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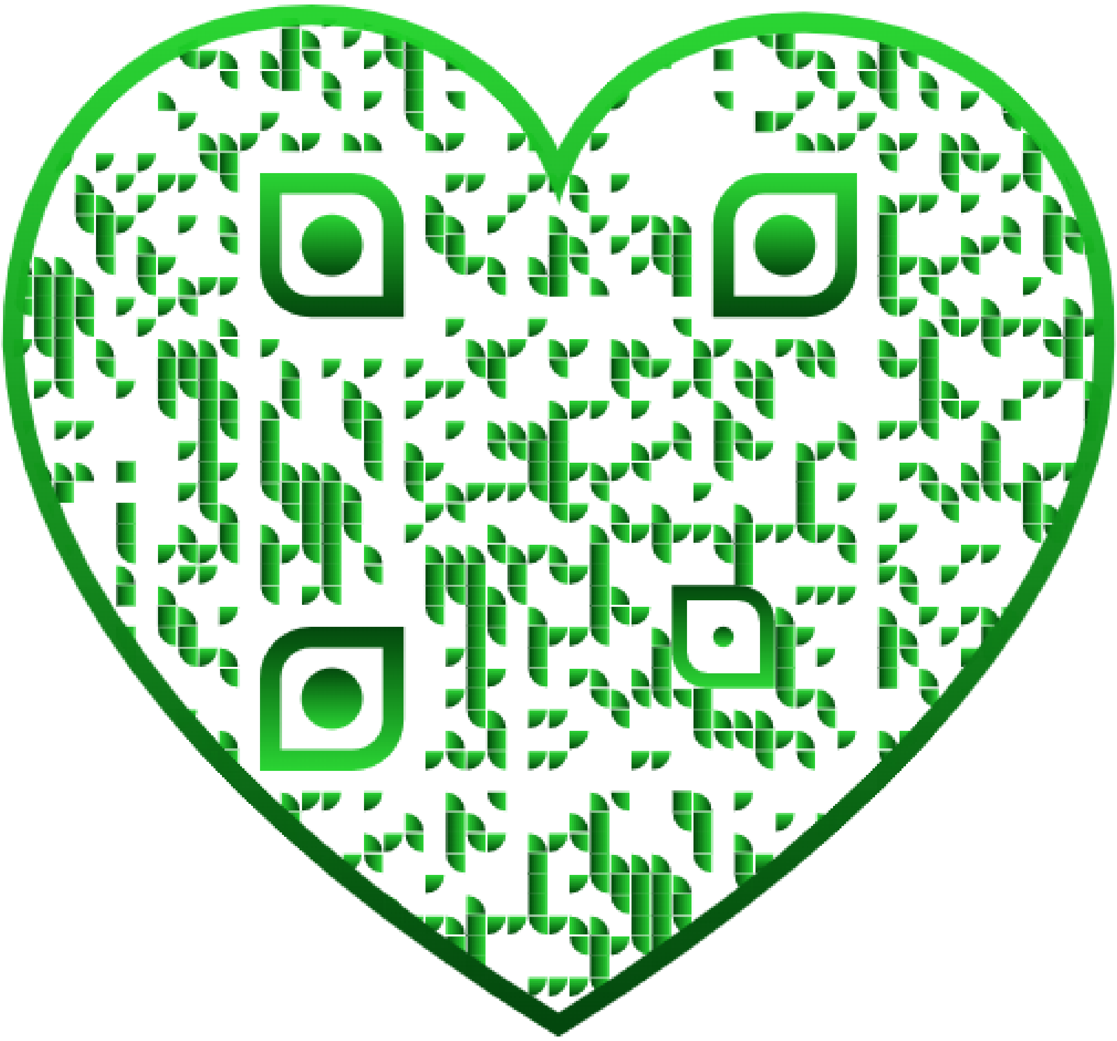

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A warm welcome

Gardening as a movement for good

It is raining outside as I write, and rather gusty, which means even more of the leaves from the majestic beech tree by my house will be landing on the drive. Yes, they will therefore have to be raked up by the wheelbarrow-load on a near-daily basis (it's a very big tree), but it is good exercise.

I'm not a fan of leaf blowers., although I don't have such strong views on the topic as Cate Blanchett, pictured at Jo Thompson's gold medal-winning garden at RHS Chelsea on page 21, and I admit that it's tricky to get leaves off gravel with a rake, but otherwise I fully appreciate anyone who encourages the use of manual methods of gardening with such good humour and gusto.

Cate Blanchett talks about leaf blowers a lot and gets very animated on the topic. If you fancy a chuckle, I'd recommend a quick Google search to see some of the online videos of her talking about the issue. Personally, I worry about using machinery that might damage wildlife, so a lighter touch where possible is preferable, but then again, everyone is different and let's ditch the guilt surrounding the way we go about things. Afterall, we have enough to contend with right now.

The act of gardening can be a movement for good in itself, especially when done in a nature-friendly way. To share our precious outside space with creatures of all shapes and sizes feels wonderful and the more that we have, the more potential there is for balance and better natural pest control. The more predators there are, the more plant nibblers can be kept in check and turned into beneficial food.

There is no quick fix, and every year will be different with the weather challenges each one brings, but as well as the on-the-ground benefit of a wildlife-laden garden, there is the massive wellbeing gain for us gardeners in the process. It's uplifting to be able to feel like we are doing our bit for the planet and to revel in the sheer joy of close encounters with birds, butterflies and the natural world in all its glory.

Toby Buckland writes about how gardening has been used through the ages and in different cultures on page 62, it's a fascinating read. Toby also talks about how our precious outside spaces offer us so much in the present day and help us nurture ourselves as much as the plants and produce we grow. The more we can carry on gardening the better - safely of course, wrapped up nice and snug against the elements, but my word does it feel good!

As for the leaf-raking, well they are a wonderful supply of compost and leaf mould ingredients and worth getting extremely excited about. I'm also using some of the ample supply of leaves (thank you beech tree) to mulch around my forest garden fruit trees as that space can be prone to minor flooding. I also like to create little leaf piles in corners of the garden, where they won't get blown around too much, to act as impromptu insect shelters. These supplies of leaves will come in very handy as free seed compost in years to come, which is is just lovely.

We would absolutely love to hear about any community gardening projects and acts of green-fingered kindness going on right now, so if you are involved in a wellbeing project in your area, please do get in touch and tell us more. Please send details to editor@amateurgardening.com.

In this issue our merry band of brilliant expert *AG* contributors include Ruth Hayes, Bob Flowerdew, Graham Clarke, Anne Swithinbank, Lucy Chamberlain, Michael Perry, John Negus, Mike Palmer, Andrew Oldham, Liz Zorab, Chris Collins, Barbara Segall, Rosie Irving, Toby Buckland and Ellen Mary.

We hope you enjoy everything we have put together for you.

Please keep writing in. We love receiving your ideas, letters, questions, musings and poems. The spirit of *AG* continues rejuvenated, working towards a brighter green future for us all, together.

Kim x

Kim Stoddart *AG*'s editor-in-chief

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But after a few years, it started to take its toll, even at distances that should have been easy for someone of Paul's age and fitness levels. "I was worried about my knees not being as good as they used to be. I felt very apprehensive as walking is not only my passion, but my business.

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"I called FutureYou Cambridge and they were really, really helpful. They sent me lots of information about studies that have been done on turmeric, and I was convinced by the studies and the science.

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8

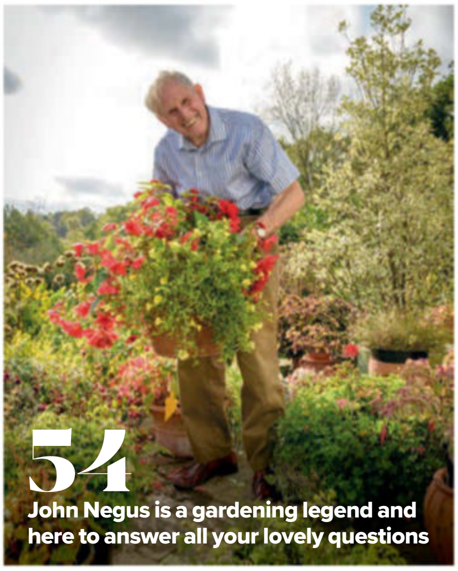
Ruth's warming and wonderful ideas for the fortnight ahead

62

Toby's talking gardening through the ages and as a force for good in the here and now

16

Kim reveals 5 ways to help protect your garden this winter



54

John Negus is a gardening legend and here to answer all your lovely questions

Your gardening fortnight

6 Your news fortnight
8 Ruth Hayes - jobs and ideas
12 Lucy Chamberlain - fruit and veg
15 Chris Collins - Small space | Big ideas
16 Kim Stoddart - 5 ways to protect your garden this winter

Great garden ideas

20 How to create a romantic garden - exclusive Jo Thompson interview - Barbara Segall
24 The natural forager's garden - Anne Swithinbank
28 How to have a hauntingly beautiful halloween display - Mike Palmer
34 Gardening for wellbeing project idea - Thrive
36 Bright ideas for bulbs to plant this autumn - Liz Zorab
40 Why it's high time for a heather revival - Rosie Irving
46 How to grow your own hedge the thrifty way - Andrew Oldham
50 Homegrown health - growing and using rosemary - Ellen Mary
60 Your great gardening gift guide

Gardening wisdom

44 Gardening tea break - Graham Clarke
53 Seed-sowing advice, and events
54 Ask John Negus - your questions
57 Your letters to *AG*
61 Dahlias to brighten every border - Michael Perry
62 Gardening as a force for good - Toby Buckland
66 How to stay warm this winter - Bob Flowerdew

Contact us:

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NEXT ISSUE OUT
1 November 2025

ipso. Regulated

Your NEWS FORTNIGHT

Bringing you some of the gardening news highlights

The Gardener's House in Penzance has become a thriving community hub

© Penzance Town Council

Green hub offers a community lifeline

House and garden opens after nine-year renovation

After nine years of renovations, an almost derelict building and garden in Cornwall has been transformed into a thriving community space.

The Gardeners' House in Morrab Gardens, Penzance, is now hosting wellbeing workshops and community-led green projects and has a brand-new sensory garden.

It houses a living archive of local stories, history and nature dating back 200 years and is the base for Sustainable Penzance, which works to create a more sustainable community.

The restoration has been funded by several organisations, including the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) which provided £30,000 that helped unlock further aid including a £2.2 million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and a £896,000 grant from Penzance Town Deal Fund.

Gardeners' House director Miki Ashton said: "We are incredibly excited to be able to finally open our doors and are deeply grateful for all the support and enthusiasm we have received from our community."

Matthew Mckeague, Architectural Heritage Fund Chief Executive Officer, said: "We know that communities benefit enormously from improved public realms and access to green spaces, and this is exactly why the Architectural Heritage Fund is delighted to have supported Morrab Gardens."

Other historic projects helped by the AHF include buildings in Bishop's Park in Carmarthenshire, Queen's Park Glasshouses in Glasgow and The Orangery in Ingestre, Staffordshire.

St Godwald's Retreat has a new home at Primrose Hospice

Medal-winning garden donated to hospice

An award-winning garden from RHS Malvern Spring Festival has been donated to Primrose Hospice in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire.

St Godwald's Retreat was designed by Marc Harbourne-Bessant and built by F.B. & Sons. It won a bronze medal at the show.

Angelique Dalton, Chief Operating Officer at Primrose Hospice, described the garden as 'magical'.

She said: "We're just so grateful the team approached us and focused on how it would benefit the patients and their families that we look after."

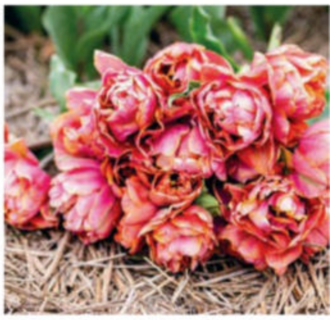
T&M sparks tulip fever

If you are looking for something special in the tulip department, Thompson & Morgan may have just what you're looking for.

This year has seen the brand launch its largest ever tulip season, with 40 stunning new varieties. Elegant double and peony-type blooms play a starring role.

Vicky Ager from T&M said: "Being a seasonal bulb, there's the freedom to experiment every year with something new."

To see the full range, visit www.thompson-morgan.com



Right: 'Coral Ruffles' is one of the flamboyant new tulips

African skills take root in North Wales

A nurse who grew up on a farm in Africa is using the skills she learned there to set up a community allotment in North Wales.

Grace Luwemba Kamwendo was asked by ClwydAlyn Housing to come up with ideas for vegetables to plant in its community allotment in Garden City, Flintshire.

Although conditions are very different from those in Malawi, Grace has grown a range of veggies including kale, pumpkins, tomatoes and cucumbers using techniques learned from her grandfather.

Grace says that anyone can grow their own with 'a little bit of soil, a little pot, a little bit of water, some sunshine and some seeds'.

Above: Grace Luwemba Kamwendo is helping communities grow their own in North Wales

© Shutterstock

If you know a person or organisation who is helping your community to grow, please let us know at editor@amateurgardening.com

The spruce bark beetle damages and kills trees by boring under the bark

© Shutterstock

Drones and dogs help save threatened forest

Unique teamwork is used to help beat spruce bark beetle

Drones and sniffer dogs are playing vital roles in protecting the UK's forests from a tiny but ferocious threat.

The spruce bark beetle has devastated spruce forests across Europe and is so small that winds have blown it across the English Channel to continue its trail of destruction here.

The Sitka spruce (*Picea stitchensis*) is widely grown in the UK for timber and if the beetle gets a foothold in plantations, it could have immense financial and ecological repercussions.

Spruce bark beetles breed under the tree bark, creating a network of tunnels. Healthy trees can produce enough protective sap to drive them out, but trees already stressed by climate change quickly succumb to the massed invasion.

Government scientists now say that infestations have been eradicated from vulnerable areas in the east and south east of the country, though they are not resting on their laurels as the effects of climate change mean they have to be alert for further unwanted arrivals.

Multi-million pound grant to help Kew building

A £5 million grant has been given to The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew to help with the renovation of the iconic Palm House.

The money, one of the largest single donations in Kew's history, was given by The Julia Rausing Trust.

Alongside the wider Palm House project, funds will go towards refurbishing the Waterlily House and upgrading its heating system to help realise the garden's net zero ambitions.

Kew director Richard Deverell said: "We are incredibly grateful to The Julia Rausing Trust for this visionary gift.

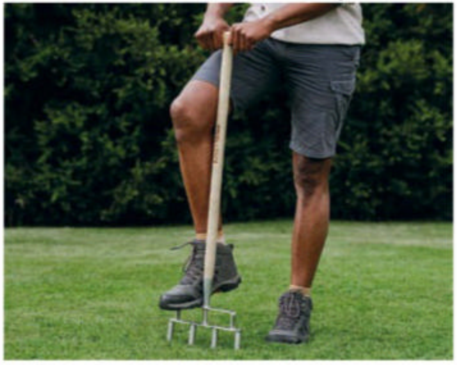
"It will not only help us protect the extraordinary heritage of the Waterlily House but might inspire others to consider donating to help us renovate these iconic buildings."

The Waterlily House was built between 1844 and 1848 and considered groundbreaking at that time.

Simon Fourmy, Chief Executive of The Julia Rausing Trust, said: "Kew's work as a global leader in botanical science and horticulture is well known, and The Julia Rausing Trust is proud to be an early supporter. We hope others will join us in supporting Kew."

Above: The Waterlily House will benefit from the £5 million grant

The Kent and Stowe aerator can help our lawns recover



Autumn lawncare helps grass recover after the dry summer

Westland's Rob Clarke has some top advice for helping gardeners repair their lawns after the tough dry summer that's just passed.

He said: "We should think of our lawns like an animal going into hibernation – grass will need to store nutrients ahead of a long, dark and cold winter, so it can bounce back ready for springtime."

He recommends scarifying grass with a rake to remove dead plant material and moss, aerating to improve drainage, feeding with a specific autumn lawn food and reseeding grass before it gets too cold.

For further details, visit Westland's lawn care hub at www.gardenhealth.com/hubs/lawn-care

'Significant' Scottish forest wins protected status

A forest of juniper and silver birch trees at Scotland's Dundreggan rewilding estate has been given protected status thanks to its 'globally significant diversity'.

The woodland is special as the trees are thriving in an area of high rainfall, which is unusual for junipers and may mean they have adapted to the climate through genetic modification.

The 10,000-acre estate near Loch Ness is now part of a European network of genetically important sites known as Gene Conservation Units.

Gwen Raes, Dundreggan Estate Manager, said: "The unusually wet location for juniper, and the extreme westerly location of silver birch, have contributed to making their populations at Dundreggan very special."

Right: **Juniper trees in the Scottish Highlands have adapted to changing climactic conditions**

© Shutterstock

Are you involved in community growing projects where you live? Send in your news by emailing **editor@amateurgardening.com**

Your
GREAT GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with *AG*'s **Ruth Hayes**

The debris I swept off our patio could have caused flooding if it had ended up in a drain Inset: Huge relief to see fresh shoots emerging from my potted delphinium divisions

Getting the whole garden ready for winter

Plants and patios both need your attention now

Sometimes, isn't it the small things that give the greatest joy? In the September 20 issue I wrote about an overcrowded and seriously depleted delphinium crown that I'd dug up and divided.

It had failed dismally in the border, thanks to the extreme dryness and a couple of other perennials (looking at you, overenthusiastic sunflower and humungous hollyhock) that were seriously cramping its style.

I didn't hold out much hope for it and sent a heartfelt plea to St Fiacre (patron saint of gardeners) that at least one of the divisions would pull through.

Patio weeds are no match for a sharpened hoe

It seems he was listening, because a couple of weeks later, all three of the potted pieces started to produce healthy shoots and now, mid-way through October, I need to decide what to do with them. Do I keep them potted up or plant them out? Oh for a crystal ball to see what the winter holds for us!

Young hardy plants such as my delphiniums generally have a better chance of surviving winter in the soil than in pots (as long as waterlogging isn't an issue) because their roots are more insulated.

But as I am planning some restructuring of the garden this winter, my initial thought is to keep them in their pots in the cold frame to offer them some protection if we do have a prolonged cold snap.

Tender plants such as pelargonium and many bedding plants you may be trying to overwinter should all be kept somewhere frost-free, either in a greenhouse, porch or cool room.

Autumn isn't just about bedding down plants, and I'm using the days when the weather is still relatively kind to spend some time cleaning down our patio and decking.

I'll move permanent containers of shrubs and perennials somewhere sheltered, raised up on feet so excess rain and snowmelt can easily escape.

Then it's time to remove weeds and wind-blown debris from hard surfaces, scrub off slippery moss and algae, using natural methods, and make sure gutters and drains are clear.

The dry summer means that our soil and lawns have been left as absorbent as concrete and until they soften, torrential rain - which seems to be increasingly the norm - will simply run off on to roads, pavements, decking and patios.

If these are not kept clear, rain-borne muck will clog drains and soakaways, adding to the problem of flash flooding, so do spend time with a brush and hoe and keep flat surfaces pristine.

All we can do is prepare for the worst and hope for the best, as the saying goes.

Four quick jobs to get you ready for autumn

1 Make sure trees are securely tied and staked before storms, especially young or newly planted ones.

2 Clean and sharpen bladed tools in preparation for all the pruning you may do this autumn.

3 Check greenhouse heaters are working (if you use one) and stock up on protective fleece.

4 Save money by cleaning soil off canes and other summer plant supports after use to reduce the risk of the ends rotting.

All images unless otherwise credited © Ruth Hayes

We bought our beautiful 'Discovery' apple tree as a bare-root whip and look how it's grown!

The benefits of bare-root planting

A sustainable and reliable way of buying woody plants

They say that autumn and winter are the quieter times in the garden, but frankly I think that whomever 'they' are need to have a word with themselves.

The coming months may not have the fevered busyness of the warmer months when everything is growing full pelt, but there is still plenty to do.

Somewhat counterintuitively, the weeks while everything lies dormant and resting are the prime moments for adding woody plants to your garden.

Young bare-root trees, shrubs, rose bushes and soft fruits are widely available online and can be planted now. These usually look like insignificant twigs, or the slenderest saplings, and come with - as the name suggests - no soil around their roots.

But don't be deceived, these plants are powerhouses of growth and if you get them in the ground this autumn/winter - as long as the soil isn't waterlogged or frozen - they will launch into life when the warmer weather arrives in spring.

Bare-root plants don't look like much but will soon grow

The majority of trees we have added to our garden over the years have come from bare-root stock, including fruit trees and our boundary hedge of native trees.

Without fail, they have all thrived and now, after 10 years in the case of the hedge, they add infinite delights to the garden, providing shade, structure, blossom and fruits, and acting as a windbreak during the stormiest days.

I think bare-root plants are brilliant because they are cheaper and more sustainable as they don't require plastic packaging or pots, and they establish quickly.

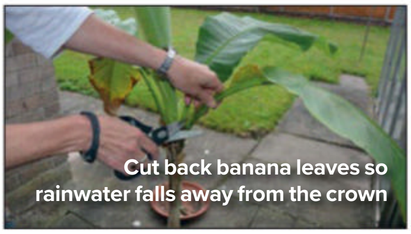
Once your bare-root plants arrive, they should be planted as soon as possible so the roots don't dry out.

If you have to delay, stand the roots in water for 30 minutes or so (no longer than two hours or they will drown) and store the plants somewhere cool and shaded.

If for any reason the delay looks prolonged due to unsuitable planting conditions, pot them up or 'heel' them into a temporary home in a sheltered patch of soil.

Protecting banana plants

Keep them snug through winter



Cut back banana leaves so rainwater falls away from the crown

- As the colder weather arrives, it's time to make your banana plants snug for winter.
- Relatively hardy *Musa basjoo* is most common in the UK and once the first frosts have blackened the leaves, it will start to go dormant.
- Cut back the leaves (if you can reach) making sloping cuts away from the centre of the plant so rainwater doesn't collect in the crown.
- If you have a large plant in the ground, surround its trunk with a cage of chicken wire and stuff it with straw and then encase it in fleece or hessian.
- Potted plants should be cut down to 1m (3ft) tall, mulched with well-rotted compost and/or straw and then the pot should be wrapped in bubble wrap and fleece.
- Put it somewhere sheltered and make sure the pot is raised up on feet to let moisture escape.
- Tender, red-leaved *Ensete ventricosum* bananas are best grown in containers, wrapped in autumn and moved somewhere frost-free for winter.

Swaddle containers to insulate the vulnerable roots through winter

Keep your compost heap composting

We have a two-bin compost pile, with one section constantly added to with kitchen peelings, grass clippings and other green garden waste, as well as shredded prunings, spent compost and paper.

The other side is left to break down for several months, and we care for it by turning regularly, watering it when there's been no rain for ages and covering it to keep in the humid warmth when colder weather arrives.

I always find it fascinating to watch it progress from an overflowing bin of green and brown plant matter to a bin full of nut-scented, rich, crumbly compost that will go on to nurture the garden.

Compost heaps will be mounding up across the country as we take out summer bedding plants and weeds, start pruning, collect fallen leaves and cut our lawns.

Above: **Turning the compost heap is a good autumn workout!** Inset: **Good quality homemade compost is brilliant for the soil and saves money**

To get the optimum balance in your bin, make sure you mix everything well and don't overdo any one material. Too many grass clippings, for example, can turn into a stinky, slimy mass, while too many large prunings won't break down.

Take care when turning your compost as all sorts of wonderful garden creatures may be giving it a once-over as a prospective hibernation site, and if you spread it on your beds, do so when the soil is damp and not frozen.

Top tip

When you harvest rhubarb always twist and pull the stems, instead of cutting them, as it encourages the plant to produce more

Divide rhubarb crowns when they are dormant and discard old and rotten parts

Dividing rhubarb to boost cropping

Split crowns every few years so they don't run out of steam

Rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb - no, that's not me talking too much, it's me already dreaming about next spring and the crumbles, pies and fools to come.

I adore rhubarb, that glorious clean tang that goes so well with a sweet, crumbly topping and a generous dollop of cream or ice cream, which is why I get so excited when our crowns start to pop out shoots in early spring.

This year, though, the stems were a bit weedy and not as prolific, which is a sign that the plants need a bit of a refurb to keep them producing well.

Established rhubarb crowns need dividing roughly every five years otherwise they run out of steam. The best time to do this is between mid-autumn and spring when the plants are dormant and the soil is workable, and not frozen or waterlogged.

It's one of those jobs that can be quite strenuous but it's well worth it because you will end up with several new, healthy plants that will crop well in years to come.

I chop the crowns with a carefully-aimed spade, but an old bread knife does the job just as well. Make sure each division has healthy roots and top growth.

Compost the woody central bit of the crown, which is now likely to be the least productive part, and bin any bits that look rotten or diseased.

Plant the divisions immediately and don't force the new plants next spring. Ideally, wait a year before harvesting. If you absolutely must take some stems next year, take as few as possible.

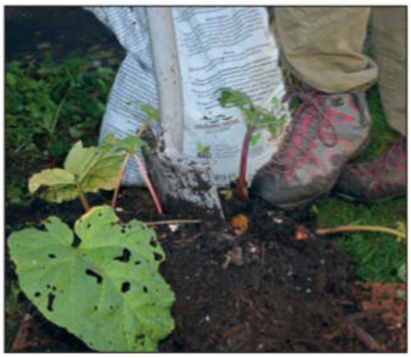
Two uses for old compost

1 Don't chuck old growbag compost! Remove all the old plant debris and lurking pests and use it to mulch soil in autumn.

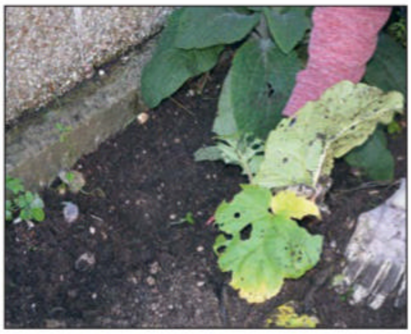
2 I add fertiliser to emptied growbags and use them to grow winter salads in the greenhouse. Fresh leaves add taste and crunch to winter sandwiches!

Dividing rhubarb

Several plants from a healthy crown

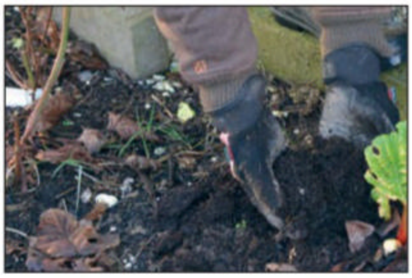


1 Carefully lift the crown from the ground and slice it into pieces with a sharp spade or old kitchen knife.



2 Plant divisions immediately at the same depth as they were planted before. Firm down the soil around them.

3 Water generously to soak the soil and settle it around the roots.



4 Rhubarb needs winter's cold to grow well, but plants will appreciate a mulch of well-rotted compost/manure to boost their soil.

STEP-BY-STEP GARDENING

WITH DAVID DOMONEY

YouTube

Blue Diamond Garden Centres, the UK's No.1 garden centre group*, and David Domoney, broadcaster, author and Chartered Horticulturist, have partnered to produce a brand-new television series, now streaming exclusively and for free, on YouTube.

Titled **"Step-by-Step Gardening with David Domoney at Blue Diamond's Bridgemere Show Gardens"**, each monthly episode blends expert advice with simple, step-by-step ideas to make gardening accessible and enjoyable to everyone. For anyone with a love of plants and nature, this series is a must-watch. Filmed at the spectacular Bridgemere Show Gardens in Cheshire, an RHS Partner Garden, it's packed with inspiring ideas you can try at home.

YouTube's most-watched gardening programme of 2025!

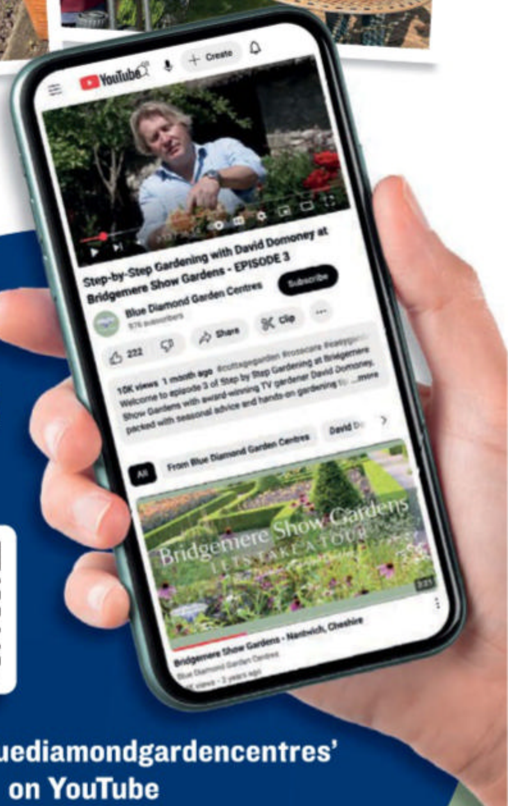
David will demystify many tricks of the professionals, empowering you to create the garden you have always wanted and to succeed like never before.

With just four episodes released, the series has already attracted over 1 million viewers, making it YouTube's most-watched gardening programme of 2025!

The next episode will be aired on Friday 31st October at 5pm with highlights on the marvels of Autumn colour, hedgehogs and what vegetables to plant now. Thereafter, there will be 16 more episodes planned over the next year, one a month, then fortnightly in March, April, May and June.

*Based on turnover and currently 51 centres across the UK and Channel Islands.

Accessible through your Smart TV, tablet or mobile, all for FREE exclusively on YouTube.



Step-by-Step Gardening with David Domoney at Bridgemere Show Gardens - EPISODE 3

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Your VEG GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**

Protecting soil, planting onion sets and growing fantastic food over winter

Lucy suggests some great autumn jobs for the weeks ahead

I'm so excited that I can finally write about soil! At last, it's on trend, and it's SO important to look after yours. So, let's see what the timely options are as soil shifts from being the home of our summer crops to its earthy self during winter.

Keeping soil 'life' robust and healthy is paramount – what I mean here is that the soil 'ecosystem' (such as the larger millipedes, earthworms, etc alongside the smaller fungi and bacteria) needs to be kept in good balance. In summer, warmth helps this tick along but as winter approaches we can step in to give it a helping hand. A covering of bulky mulch (e.g. garden compost), cardboard (hoard your cardboard packaging) or hardy green manure (such as Italian ryegrass or clover) will form a carpet to insulate the soil and lock in moisture, thereby helping the life within it to ride out winter chills. Green manures also hold on to soil nutrients while organic matter such as garden compost can add them. If you're an organic gardener, this approach is a fundamental part of your thinking – keeping soil life buoyant and diverse will help prevent any problems from arising.

Of course, as gardeners, we intervene and in doing so, we can accidentally affect this balance. For example, if you grow a bed of potatoes you can inadvertently invite wireworms or nematodes into your soil. Asparagus beds will often harbour overwintering asparagus beetles, gooseberry bushes may well have sawfly pupae amongst their roots, and beds of strawberries can be a target for vine weevil. In these instances here's where I'd argue that leaving the soil bare is an option. A harsh, penetrating frost will help kill off overwintering pests sheltering just below the soil surface (of course, it can kill beneficial life, too, but in many winters now, harsh frosts are infrequent).

So, in essence, current thinking supports covering bare soil in autumn, but don't disregard the benefits of a decent frost should soil pests become a nuisance in one area.

Find out how to protect bare soil over winter with Lucy's expert advice

All images unless otherwise credited © Lucy Chamberlain

Plant overwintering onion sets

✿ Onion lovers, listen up! If you have a spare patch of earth in an open, sunny spot, then planting some autumn onion sets now will bring you an earlier harvest come next year (at least one month earlier than spring-sown or planted onions). So, with that in mind, how do we go about it? Let me explain:

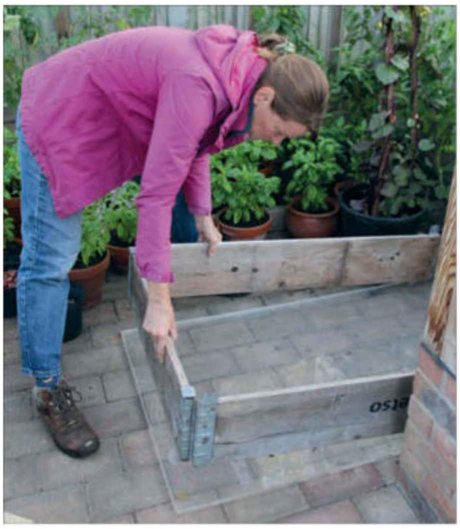
Garden centres will stock packs of onion 'sets' now. These are onion bulbs that have been lifted and dried whilst still tiny (generally, the size of a 20p coin). The onion sets sold in autumn are hardier than those available in spring – they're usually Japanese types such as 'Senshyu', or specially developed varieties such as the Dutch-bred 'Akado'. Planted now, the tiny sets will bulk up to full-sized onions come late May.

Your chosen bed should be free-draining and free of weeds. Fork it over, rake it level and then plant your sets 20 to 25cm (7.9 to 9.8in) apart each way. Keep weed-free, add a top-dressing of chicken pellets in February – and thank me come May!

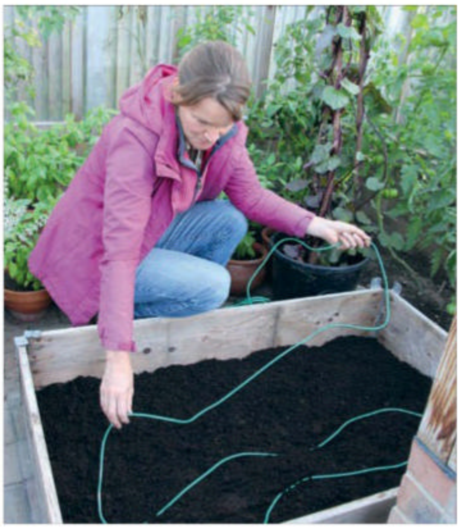
If you fancy a lovely earlier onion harvest next year then you can plant out onion sets now

Step by step Make a winter hotbox

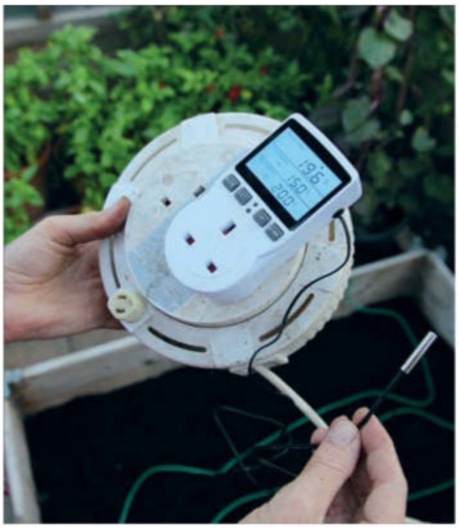
There's no need for our growing season to slow down just because winter is on its way. As well as growing hardy cabbages, leeks and Brussels sprouts outside, you can keep a gaggle of edibles growing undercover, too. Heat mats offer a small-space solution, but if you fancy devoting a larger area to winter salads and veg, why not make a hotbox? Here's how I do it:



1 Locate some strong planks of wood, at least 20cm (7.9in) tall, for the sides of your box, and a sturdy sheet of metal, plastic or waterproofed wood as a base. I use pallet 'collars' as they're already hinged, along with a sheet of rigid polycarbonate for the base. Lay the base in your (unheated) greenhouse or polytunnel, on a flat floor.



2 Spread a 2cm (0.7in) layer of sand or compost (I prefer compost because it's more lightweight) on the base of your box. Snake soil warming cables (these are inexpensive and readily available online, or via some garden centres) on top of the compost/sand, so they're 10 to 12cm (3.9 to 4.7in) apart. Cover over the cables with a further 2cm (0.7in) layer of compost/sand.



3 To gain precise temperature control, incorporate a thermostat to the box (again, these are now readily available) and set it to come on as temperatures dip below 12°C (53.6°F). Water the base of the box lightly then add trays of hardy lettuce, kale, chicory, coriander, spinach, chard or other leafy edibles. These will bulk up for harvests throughout winter.

Top tip

Check your greenhouse heater

✿ If you've stepped into the world of greenhouse ownership, you'll know how useful these buildings are for overwintering tender edibles like lemongrass and citrus, protecting cool-season crops like spinach and chard, and propagating winter harvests of cut-and-come-again salad leaves and microgreens. So, avoid being caught out by a faulty heater trying to thwart your plans. Check that it's in full working order now, before the winter really bites down on the UK. My electric heater is thermostatically controlled (so it only kicks in once temperatures fall below a certain level). I'm testing that this mechanism still works properly so that on chilly November nights I'm safe in the knowledge that my precious edibles are fully protected. If you still rely on paraffin or gas heaters, make sure you've got plenty of fuel on standby.

Hotbox ELITE

Right: Lucy explains how to get set for winter food growing

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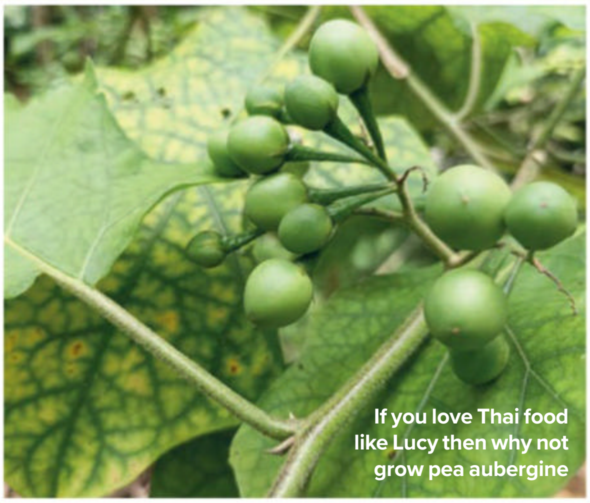
Your VEG GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with Lucy Chamberlain

Why not try...?

Pea aubergine

✿ Regular *AG* readers may have learnt of my obsession with Thai food, and so in this issue I'm going to take us all one step closer to producing a truly authentic, homegrown curry. Pea aubergines are tiny round aubergines, green in colour, added to dishes to bring a firm, slightly tart bite. The plant that produces them is *Solanum torvum*, a short-lived tender perennial that develops into a woody shrub. It can be grown from seed, which, if you're familiar with our more conventional, larger-fruited aubergines (varieties of *S. melongina*), you'll know is sown in February or March into a heated propagator. Treat pea aubergines the same way, but be ready to overwinter them now, by bringing them somewhere frost-free and well lit. With compost kept just damp until growth resumes in spring, you'll be due a beautifully aromatic and creamy curry come summer of 2026.

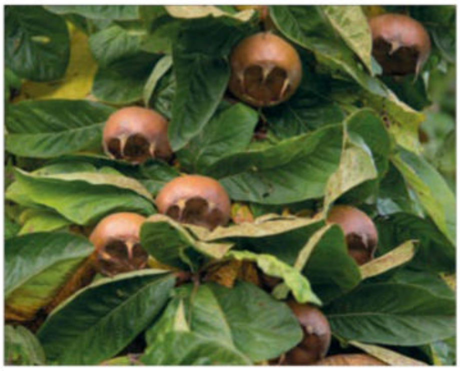


If you love Thai food like Lucy then why not grow pea aubergine

5 quick jobs...

1 Owners of potted fruit trees, canes and bushes should check their plants now for root congestion. Pot-bound plants struggle to stay moist in summer, so re-pot them into a larger container using appropriate compost. For me, this is a 75:25 by volume mix of multipurpose and John Innes No. 3, but adjust this for acid-loving fruits.

2 If you have a heavy, clay soil it's best to lift and store root crops rather than leave them on the plot for winter (wet earth will invite slugs and rots). So, harvest maincrop carrots, beets, swedes etc, wash off soil and remove foliage, then pack them carefully into boxes of damp sand. These can be stored in sheds till needed.



3 My parents own a medlar tree – if you have one too, you'll know the harvest routine. Leave the fruits on the tree until just before the first frosts, then harvest and store in trays in a shed or garage. Only consume them once they've turned from hard light brown fruits into soft dark brown ones (a process known as 'bletting').

4 Now is the ideal time to lift and divide congested clump-forming herbs such as mint, oregano, lemon balm and bergamot. Doing this every few years keeps plants young, vigorous and productive. Knock pot-grown plants out of their pot, or dig up those in beds then, using a spade or old bread knife, slice into clumps and re-plant.

5 If you fancy boosting your Vitamin E and magnesium levels, don't forget that some pumpkin varieties produce 'hulless' seeds. These are devoid of the tough outer seed casing, making them easy to extract when you harvest your pumpkins. Simply clean them up then roast them (I like to coat mine in spices) for a nutrient-dense snack.

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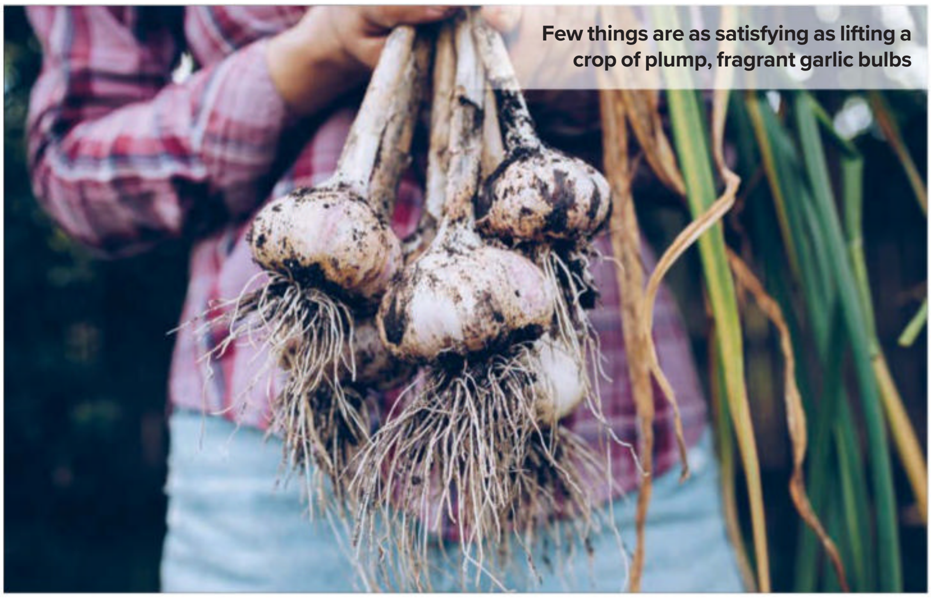
Small space | Big ideas

With **Chris Collins**, Garden Organic's Head of Horticulture



Few things are as satisfying as lifting a crop of plump, fragrant garlic bulbs

Easy garlic growing

Chris Collins explains how to grow your own supply of this great cooking ingredient

Pungent, fragrant garlic is a must-have vegetable in my house - and it's so easy to grow with very little maintenance. Autumn is the perfect time to get this crop in the ground as it likes a cold spell to spring it into action.

You can choose softneck varieties, such as 'Solent Wight', which have abundant cloves (these are the kind that can be plaited and stored for long periods). Or, go for hardneck types, such as 'Chesnok Wight' with its purple stripes (these are superior for flavour but don't store as well and can run to seed more easily). You can also buy 'elephant garlic', which produce giant cloves. This is a fantastic variety for kids as they're fun to plant and have a much milder flavour – though you won't get as many planted in a small garden or pot.

Carefully break up the bulbs into the separate cloves before planting

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How to prepare the soil

You don't want the ground or compost to be too wet, so choose a nice, sunny spot. Garlic also benefits from a mulch of organic matter, such as well-rotted compost, added to the surface of the soil or in your container. You can grow six cloves in a 25cm (10in) pot that's around 10cm (4in) deep. Open ground is easier, as the cloves will be in situ for a prolonged period.

Get the cloves (seed) ready

Split your garlic bulb into cloves (carefully, so you don't damage them). You'll get a little reminder of their gorgeous aroma as you plant! Look for cloves that are large and fat. You can plant the smaller ones, but they are unlikely to produce a decent bulb, so take those home to eat.

Time to get planting

I like to use a dibber to make a small dent in the soil. This means I avoid pushing the cloves too hard into the ground. It's easy to damage the root at the bottom. Plant the clove into this dent, with the tip just below the soil surface. Birds think it's a game to get garlic cloves out of the ground! So, you may want to protect your newly sown crop with some eco mesh.

For more advice on organic gardening head to **www.gardenorganic.org.uk**, where you can also find out how to become a member and support the charity.

Grow from plump, firm, healthy-looking bulbs and dispose of any cloves that are soft or look mouldy

© Garden Organic

Maintenance and harvest

Weed carefully as they grow, they're not fans of competition, and harvest June/July from an autumn planting. You must try some roasted whole: it's simply delicious!

Chris's Q&As

Q How do I harvest and store garlic?

A Carefully dig out garlic when the first four leaves turn yellow. Keep your bulbs in a dry place for a few weeks (if the weather is fine, they can stay outside resting above the ground.) Bulbs are ready to store when skins are dry and papery. Plait into ropes or hang in net sacks which allow the air to circulate freely.

Q Can I grow garlic from supermarket cloves?

A You can, but it's best not to because garlic from the supermarket can be sprayed with chemicals and growth inhibitors. Also, organic bulbs could be infected with disease such as rot which you don't want to bring into your garden.

Q My soil is wet; can I plant my garlic?

A It's best to wait until conditions are drier as garlic rots in wet soil. If conditions are poor, try starting off indoors in a cool greenhouse. Place the cloves in modules of peat-free compost and plant them out when the weather improves. Also avoid watering after the bulb has formed.

5 ways to protect your garden this winter

Editor and extreme weather-gardening expert **Kim Stoddart** outlines ways to help protect and nurture your precious outside space - and yourself - over the months ahead

As the leaves fall from the trees and the garden slowly, but surely, slows down with the seasonal changes, it's time to get set for the months ahead.

We know there are going to be multifarious winter storms and goodness knows what else on the horizon, so being prepared in a way that helps your individual garden and its particular vulnerabilities is key.

There are a lot of simple methods to help shore up the defences, simply by replicating the natural world in all its glory and letting it lend a helping hand to benefit everything.

Take a moment to reflect and let the garden break down naturally

1. Help slow the flow of wind

I've written previously about how I was told categorically that I could not grow apples or pears in my garden (field) that is 228.6m (750ft) above sea level in a very exposed location. Yet with layered planting, I absolutely could. I planted damsons as a barrier against the westerly winds and after two years they had grown sufficiently to enable the now-protected apples and pears to flourish.

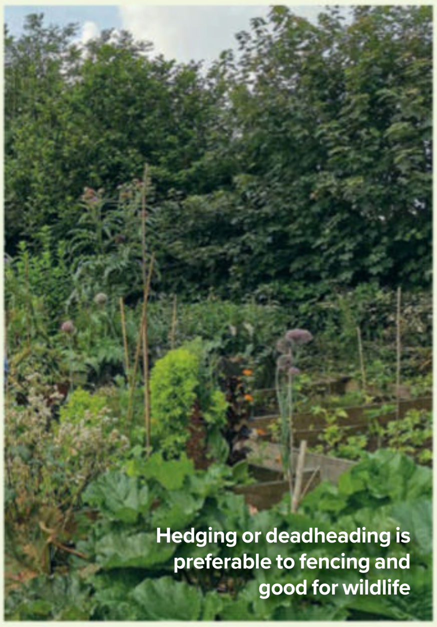
I also use hedging around my gardens and polytunnels to create a more desirable microclimate within. Further to this, mixed planting on the vegetable patch, with different sizes and layers of flowers and edibles, affords even more protection from gusty extremes.

Solid fencing will bounce wind away, causing it to roll and land somewhere else and potentially cause damage. It can also create, or worsen, frost pockets, which isn't great for plants growing nearby. Whereas hedging (which Andrew Oldham talks about on page 46), works better to slow the flow, as well as providing an attractive habitat for wildlife. This, in turn, will benefit your garden through natural pest control. You can also create a dead hedge with pruning material from the garden to provide a beneficial and attractive barrier.

Above: **If you are going to use fencing then choose materials that allow some flow**

If you want to use fencing, try and work with materials that enable the air to continue to flow through.

If you have the space, trees can also act as a good barrier and the more perennial planting you have with shrubs, the better you'll fare, as they also help the ground cope with high volumes of winter rain.


Hedging or deadheading is preferable to fencing and good for wildlife

All images unless stated © Kim Stoddart

2. Create a swale or bioswale

Speaking of perennials, if your garden has an area that's prone to sogginess or minor flooding, then a protective barrier can be created by adding permanent planting.

You can dig a ditch to enable water to also flow away (a rill), or plant within the ditch (a bioswale) to help soak up the water and afford greater protection. I also allow grass to grow long in these areas as this helps further, and I mulch around the plants with leaves, grass clippings and prunings, which affords further protection. It also feeds the plants.

You could also create a mound bed or Hügelkultur bed to help alleviate sogginess.

To do so, dig a ditch and fill it with logs and then add layers of earth, leaf mould, prunings and woodchip, with a layer of compost or earth on top which can then be planted into. The layers act like a sponge, helping soak up water and the bed itself will slowly break down - feeding whatever you have planted there, with little intervention needed by you.

Swales can be attractive as well as functional

3. Consider permeable surfaces

Hard surfaces such as concrete don't allow water to soak away so easily and can lead to a speedy build up of rain. 'Slow it, spread it, sink it' is the permaculture mantra to help reduce flooding and so the more opportunity you have to distribute excess water so it can 'sink away', the better.

Grass is permeable of course, although can become very muddy over winter if wet and walked on. Stone pathways can work well if there are gaps between the stones for soak-away opportunities, and gravel is rather superb.

It's very inexpensive to buy in bulk, but you can also source ex-building rubble to use in beds and borders, which can be placed around plants over a porous membrane to provide good weather protection. Such materials are also popular with spiders, ground beetles and earwigs, all fantastic natural pest patrol allies.

Above: **Kim's permeable pathways allow drainage** Inset: **Gravel and hardcore materials can be used to create very resilient and attractive features**

4. Let the garden break down more naturally

Kim's very late-flowering 'Teddy Bear' sunflowers and other plants will be allowed to naturally break down, providing food and shelter for wildlife and protection for the soil over winter

There's much more awareness now about the benefits of not bedding down the garden for winter, as a meticulously tidy garden is much more vulnerable to the elements, and bare soil especially so.

Instead, allowing plants to keep their stems and letting seed heads stay in situ provides a garden that is better protected and which provides garden wildlife with food and shelter over winter.

Methods such as no-dig, mulching, and the use of green manures will also help protect precious soil from the risk of nutrients leaching away over winter. There are many reasons why, but put simply, the more we can encourage natural soil systems to thrive, the better able the soil will be to cope with an excess of winter rain.

When the soil is dug over and left bare, it copes less well and its fertility can be more easily washed away with rain.

Working with the natural world in this way, with a less tidy approach, makes life easier for the gardener and it enables the natural world to flourish. The more insects we have overwintering (whether good or pesky), the more natural predators we will have to hand, as well as food for predators that will work to our benefit whatever happens with the weather next year. There is no quick fix but there is safety in numbers and a wilder, more biodiverse garden is much better able to keep a natural balance.

I leave a lot of the fallen leaves in out-of-the-way piles, as a mulch on beds and to be used on the compost heap. In my forest garden with the fruit trees I mentioned earlier, the area is also prone to minor flooding so the use of prunings and leaves as a mulch around the trees massively assists with water distribution.

5. Resilience in the garden

Last, but by no means least, it's important to look after yourself. Rather than running around with pressurised to-do lists, give yourself time and space to walk, ponder, look and learn, and think what you can do to help protect your garden.

Also, think about what you can do to help nurture yourself over the months ahead. Consider growing lovely edibles on a windowsill, or in a hotbox as Lucy Chamberlain suggests on page 12. Our gardens will still be there for us over winter to enjoy, especially if we bring some of the outside in, so that on those worst weather days we can still benefit from some green-fingered nurturing fun. There is much hope and happiness to be found in the here and now.

Above: **Make room to potter and play in the garden**

Ideas for growing undercover

In a polytunnel, greenhouse or on a windowsill, the opportunities for food growing continue. Consider growing microgreens, delicious Chinese greens, herbs such as coriander and parsley, pea shoots for salads, plus many more cut-and-come-again leaf opportunities.

Just some of the delicious undercover growing opportunities over winter

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Find out how to capture some of Jo Thompson's multi award-winning romantic style in your garden

Romancing the garden

Jo Thompson, five-times Chelsea Gold Medal-winning garden designer, author and writer explains to Barbara Segall how we can recreate her nature-friendly style at home

Jo Thompson is acknowledged as one of the top 10 garden designers in the UK and the author of several books, including her latest – *The New Romantic Garden* in which she showcases 30 gardens where her inimitable romantic style is combined with biodiversity and ecological ideas.

Jo began her design career some 30 years ago when she asked someone to help her with her own roof garden in London. At that time she was a primary school teacher and about to become a mother. Jo describes how she was transfixed by the design that was drawn to show where plants would go on her terrace. "It was a light bulb moment. I suddenly knew that was what I wanted to do and so I enrolled at The English Garden School run by Rosemary Alexander at the Chelsea Physic Garden."

Fast forward to today, and not only is Jo a lecturer herself at the London College of Design, she has built up an international practice with projects all over the UK, as well as in Corfu, Brazil and the United States. Jo's most recent Gold Medal was awarded at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2025 for The Glasshouse Garden: A Space for Growth and Inspiration for Women in Prison, where her plant palette blended deep, strong colours with soft peach and apricot tones, inspired by the idea of 'strong beauty'.

Above: Cate Blanchett, Jo Thompson and Kali Hamerton-Stove

Above: Jo at her gold medal-winning The Glasshouse Garden at RHS Chelsea earlier this year

Images © main Rachel Warne/this page Zoe Norfolk

Jo favours wildlife-friendly, free-floating planting which chimes with the location and its history

6 ways to create the romantic look

1 Use roses
This is Jo's number one suggestion. There are so many colours, shapes and habits (whether climbers, ramblers, shrubs or standards), as well as the fragrance that will add to the romance.

2 Loosen up
Jo likes planting in a looser way using plants that offer a veil-like, see-through effect and suggests that gardeners should think about the plant and the shape and style it offers and, of course, whether it is attractive and useful for pollinators in the garden.

3 Right material, right place
As far as materials are concerned, Jo is determined never to use materials that look out of place. She advises respecting the vernacular of the architecture of the house as well as existing boundary walls, and the use of materials that blend well. "Stone, brick and timber are my go-to materials. I always avoid anything that is too 'shiny' and fashionable. Much of the hard landscaping you see tends to overwhelm and take over from the planting."

4 Put the plants first
Jo tends to use plants wherever possible to provide the architecture and structure in the garden, with hard landscaping taking second place, almost acting as a vehicle for the plants. "Pergolas, for example, can look stunning in themselves, but for me their value is as vehicles for roses, clematis and other climbing plants."

5 Wildlife-friendly approach
Jo avoids using chemical deterrents, finding that if the balance is right and birds and insects are attracted into the garden, they will do the pest control work in return. Jo advises that in order to encourage wildlife, always make sure that water is available. This may be in the shape of a formal water feature or simply water at ground level. Her own mixed plantings attract so much wildlife and she notes that her garden is full of butterflies, bees and hoverflies. "One area of my garden is planted with about seven or eight different buddleias. It has never stopped buzzing."

6 Keep it simple
Jo says it's important to avoid too many different elements that might work against each other visually.

About the design style

Jo's designs are known for their harmonious linking of a garden's landscape, the colour of the plant palette she uses and the architecture of the property that sits within the garden. For Jo it is like doing a panoramic appreciation of the site. "I look at the space and the location and I listen to what the garden tells me, as well as what the clients are telling me about themselves and their garden desires."

Described as quintessentially English, well-proportioned and timeless in their appeal, Jo's designs are always relatable and start with the garden and how it presents itself to her.

"I wanted to pin down this idea of romance, with its roots a little in the past, and bring it up to date by thinking about wildlife and sustainability, and find the soul of the garden. Nature leads the way."

Image © Rachel Warne

What about the plants?

Jo says she works with a similar range of plants, tending to stick with the same varieties. “I have plants that I like and that I think will work. I am probably not trying out the very latest new arrivals. I like to know that plants are tried and tested and so I will grow new material on in my garden and see how it performs over a number of years.”

Jo likes plants that have thin profiles and offer veiled, see-through stems where the flowers appear to float in space.

Her list of reliable favourites includes:

- **Roses** first and foremost
- **Hardy geraniums**, which are so useful as ground cover and offer a whole range of soft pastel flowers
- ***Sanguisorba ssp*** with their red pom-pom or fluffy, curved flower heads
- ***Verbena bonariensis*** with tall stems and blue/mauve flowerheads
- ***Veronicastrum virginicum*** with its almost ghostly flower plumes
- ***Oenothera lindheimeri* (white gaura)** with its wand-like stems of dancing flowers
- ***Dahlia merckii***, a perennial dahlia that grows to 2m (6.6ft) with many flowering stems carrying single blooms of pink, purple or white.

Image © Rachel Warne

Above: Springwatch Garden at RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival

Image © Rachel Warne

THE NEW ROMANTIC GARDEN

The New Romantic Garden is a collection of conversations, explorations and essays on 30 of Jo’s gardens designed over the years. It is published by Rizzoli.

You can read more from Jo at *jothompson.substack.com*

THE NATURAL FORAGER'S GARDEN

With expert broadcaster, author and long-standing *AG* columnist, **Anne Swithinbank**

Storing, protecting and planning over the months ahead

Anne sets her sights on Japanese wineberries and prepares to store her winter squashes and protect her citrus

Anne's 'Crown Prince' squashes are ready to ripen further in the sun, but only up until the first frosts, before which they are safely stored away

Some call it sticky berry because the small, sweet fruits are so tacky you can almost pick them up on a finger. Mostly though, they're known as Japanese wineberries or, occasionally, dewberries. We planted one here but while my back was turned, it disappeared under a large and vigorous clump of rhubarb. The tasty fruits ripening from late July to September are an asset to any edible garden and in its prime this species (*Rubus phoenicolasius),* from the blackberry tribe, is a handsome beast. I'd grow it just for the show of red bristles on its ruby-red canes, perfect for training against a fence or parallel wires. Similar red bristles coat the calyces encasing developing fruits. New plants are inexpensive but as mature plants often layer themselves from stem tips, I'm asking around for a few layers to lift off friends before placing an order.

Earlier in the year we puzzled over seed lists, chose winter squash cultivars, sowed, planted, rejoiced in a season of fewer molluscs and fretted somewhat when only male flowers opened during the heatwave. Following faithful and regular watering, fruits set and swelled, bringing the dilemma of when to call a halt and stop the travelling vines in order to channel energy into ripening the chosen few. Finally came joy when the onset of cool autumn nights withered the leaves, revealing a harvest of well-deserved winter squash. This crop is not for fresh use, as skins must ripen in the sun for as long as possible and the flesh tastes sweeter and nuttier with keeping. The final challenge lies in finding just the right spot to store such a rich harvest.

My office outbuilding is the perfect home for citrus, as there's a lot of glass facing north east, a solid roof and cool winter temperatures. A *Citrus* x *latifolia* (also known as 'Tahiti' or Persian lime) has been growing happily here summer and winter for the pats 15 years and I should clear out some furniture and make space for oranges and lemons too. Now's the time to consider the winter care of these productive plants.

How to grow… Japanese wineberry

Wineberries are easy to grow if you don't plant them under a tree or expect them to jostle with a rhubarb. As long as soil isn't too cold or waterlogged, an autumn planting works well, but if in doubt, wait until spring. They are unfussy but flourish best in a good soil where plenty of organic matter has been added. Happy plants romp away, their bristly canes arching to 1.8m (6ft), and from an early age produce pink flowers setting to rounded red fruits smaller than a raspberry but flavoursome enough to eat raw as well as cooked. They will fruit best in a sunny spot and although light shade is tolerated, you'll be missing out if they are not planted where low winter sun will light up their fuzzy red stems. As with all newly planted fruit, keep them irrigated during dry spells for the first couple of years whilst establishing. Then, all they need is a mulch of well-rotted garden compost in autumn or spring applied over moist soil. In restricted spaces, cut out fruited canes when they have finished and tie in new ones. Otherwise, wait for older canes to die naturally before cutting them out.

Anne explains how to grow these flavoursome fruits

All images unless otherwise credited: John Swithinbank

Inset image © Shutterstock

Anne is giving her *Citrus* x *latifolia* (Persian lime) a good looking over to prepare it for winter

Six point winter citrus care

1 Whether you have a lemon, lime, orange or satsuma, the first step is to take a good look at your plant. Those stood outdoors for the summer should be brought in before the first frosts, but they dislike hot, centrally heated rooms. So do consider is your plant happy with its position and does it need better light? It may have pests (scale insects love citrus and hot, dry air will encourage spider mites) and what does the potting compost look and feel like?

2 Potting compost often breaks down and sinks lower in the pot. Should this happen, top up using a special citrus compost or John Innes no 2 with 10% added potting grit and 10% composted bark. Leave complete repotting until spring.

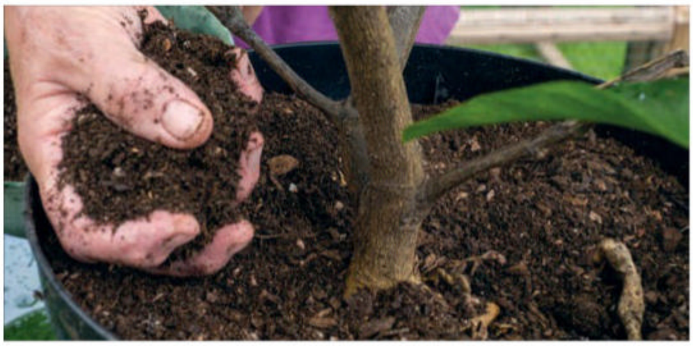
3 Sap-sucking scale insects flick out secretions of honeydew, making leaf surfaces sticky and encouraging the growth of sooty mould. For my lime, I simply wipe the upper and lower leaf surfaces with a frequently rinsed, moist cloth. This seems to dislodge many scale insects and keeps them at bay.

4 Citrus leaves should be a rich green and, depending on type, there may be flowers and fruits. Yellowing leaves indicate lack of fertiliser or poor roots due to dryness or waterlogging.

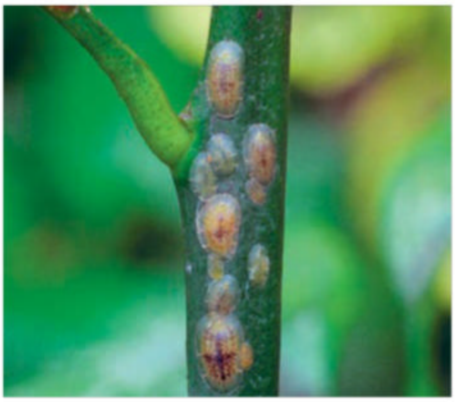
5 Citrus prefer rainwater but when unavailable, a soluble feed for acid-loving plants at quarter strength added to their tap water will help avoid the effects of too much lime. Water when the surface begins to feel dry and make sure they are not left sitting in water after initial reabsorption. Now is the time to switch from a summer citrus fertiliser to a winter feed.

6 Although citrus can withstand cold temperatures just above freezing, they prefer it warmer and vary with type. A minimum of 7 to 10C (45 to 50F) is generally good to aim for.

Step by step How to care for citrus plants



1 Top dress plants with a compost mix suitable for citrus and consider repotting in spring



2 Scale insects are a very common pest of citrus and are found on stems and leaf undersides, close to the veins. Eggs hatch into young scales under the protection of older ones.

3 Wiping leaves to remove shorty mould and dirt will help maximise winter light absorption. It will dislodge scale insects at the same time

4 Water citrus plants when the compost surface begins to dry out, using rainwater when possible

Try these... Sensational citrus varieties

Citrus unshiu 'Owari' is a satsuma; one of the hardiest types of citrus

Blood oranges are types of sweet orange good to eat fresh when ripe

***Citrus* x *limon* 'Garey's Eureka'**
Popularly known as lemon 'Four Seasons', a small tree will rarely be without flowers or fruit throughout the year. The lemons are smooth-skinned and flavoursome.
www.rootsplants.co.uk

***Citrus* x *aurantium* (sweet orange group) 'Sanguinelli'**
The sweet oranges used to be known as *Citrus sinensis* and include the blood oranges with red, sweet and juicy flesh. Expect a large tree with late spring blossom, then fruit.
www.crosscommonnursery.co.uk

Citrus unshiu
The satsuma is one of the hardiest citrus and sets fruit on compact trees with small leaves. Sweet fruits ripen in autumn and are easy to peel.
www.pomonafruits.co.uk

Storing pumpkins and other winter squash

For full, skin-hardening ripeness, allow cut winter squash to sit out in the sun for as long as possible but keep an eye on the weather forecast and bring them in before frost strikes. Most varieties will store for months, their flavour gradually improving as they disappear into roasts, pies, soups and curries. Think good ventilation and keep them slightly separate on wooden racks. Just frost-free is not warm enough, as they need a minimum of 10C (50F) to last well and a maximum of 15C (60F), so not too hot either. Ours decorate the porch but are treated to the kitchen during cold spells.

Right: Leave winter squash to ripen a little - they are safe until the first frosts

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Enjoy the colours of autumn and celebrate the season by turning pumpkins into scary jack-o'-lanterns

How to have a hauntingly beautiful halloween display

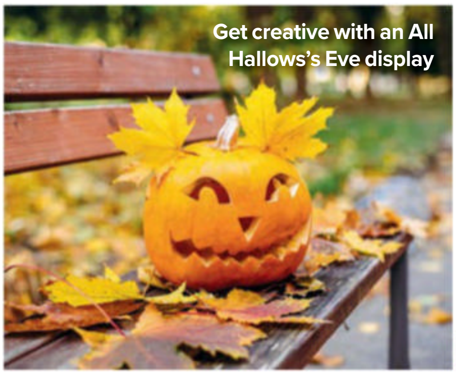
Mike Palmer shares his top eight spooky-looking plants that'll have you screaming for more

All images unless otherwise credited: Mike Palmer

> *"Ghosts, goblins, and things unseen, all make merry on Halloween"*
>
> *Traditional folk saying*

Silky black cats caterwauling at midnight, vampire bats swooping down at me in my Bournemouth garden from ghostly silhouetted trees and ebony-coloured spiders scuttling silently across a moonlit, dew-drenched lawn… If you haven't already guessed, October 31 brings All Hallow's Eve, or Halloween, as it's more commonly known; the eve before All Saints' Day.

Many, many moons ago – yes, even before I was born! – it was at this time



Get creative with an All Hallows's Eve display

© Shutterstock

Coloured toffee apples are just one of the fruity excuses for homemade Halloween sweets

Harvest pumpkins to turn into grinning jack-O'-Lanterns

of year when people believed the barrier between the living and the dead grew thin, allowing spirits to drift from their ghostly world into ours, hence its modern-day creepy connotations. It also marked the end of harvest-time and the start of a long winter, with people lighting bonfires, carving lanterns and dressing up to scare away unwelcome spirits.

In modern culture, Halloween has become a little more commercial. The ever-popular 'Trick or Treat' sees excited children traipsing the roads, well after their bedtime, surely(?!), banging loudly on our front doors, dressed as ghouls, ghosts, witches and vampires. Clutching the hands of their embarrassed parents, they hold out tiny, cold mitts for sweets and chocolate goodies, or, the threat of a Halloween trick for unco-operative neighbours. I promise you no tricks in this article, nor a need for sugared confectionary, but wait until you read about my top eight hauntingly beautiful Halloween plant treats. They may just bring goosebumps to the back of your neck and see you grabbing 'a broomstick' to fly off to your local garden centre for some horticultural treats of your own!

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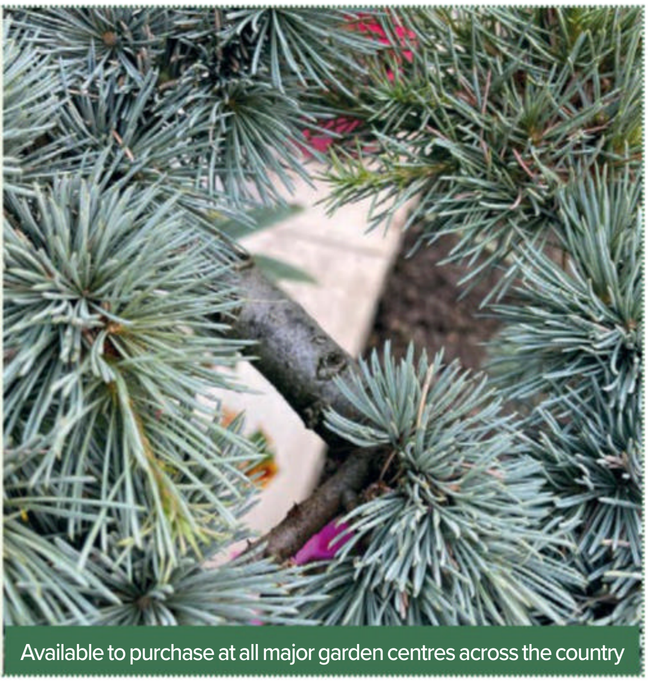
Above: Look no further than the garden for creepy-crawlies

Fun Halloween treats

There's always a glut of apples in our gardens at this time of year, so why not harvest some of them and prepare delicious, mouth-watering Halloween dishes. Baked apples crammed with dried fruit and lashings of custard, dribbled with blood-red raspberry jam make a warming Halloween treat. Or dip apples on sticks into hot toffee and leave them to cool for tasty toffee apples. And, finally, pop a dozen or so apples in a bowlful of water for some good, old-fashioned Halloween apple-bobbing fun and frolics.



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Mike's Top 8 ghost-inspired favourites

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Athyrium 'Ghost'

Is there a ghost in the house? Hopefully not, but you can definitely have a ghost in the garden with the otherworldly, deciduous *Athyrium* 'Ghost', a fiendishly favourite fern of mine that sits perfectly in the midst of a shady or partially shaded border in a moist, well-drained soil. Its silver-green, heavily pinnate, laced fronds almost glow in the dark like a spectre, falling from beetroot-coloured midribs and veins (rachis). *Athyrium* 'Ghost' looks great planted alongside other ferns, hostas and astilbes. H: 40 to 60cm (15.7 to 23.6in).

© Shutterstock

Tricyrtis hirta

Another shade-loving perennial for a magical woodland garden is the toad lily, *Tricyrtis hirta*, with its bewitching, white and purple-spotted, three-lobed flowers, putting me in mind of the skin of a psychedelic toad – which, of course, one might see, but only on All Hallow's Eve! Flowering from late summer into autumn, it looks great planted alongside ferns, including the afore-mentioned *Athyrium* 'Ghost', hostas and Hakone grasses. H: 60 to 90cm (23.6in to 35.4in)

Sambucus nigra f. *porphyrophylla* 'Eva'

With finely cut, blood-red, almost black foliage, *Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Eva', also known as *S.* 'Black Lace', cuts a spidery silhouette under the light of a mystical moon, and of course it looks pretty spectacular in full sun, too, which optimises its colour. In autumn, contrast its phantom-black foliage with purple, blue, lilac or raspberry-coloured asters. Clusters of small, shiny, purple-black berries hang from its branches and these can be cooked and used in jams, jellies, cordials and wines - Happy Halloween, hic! H: 2 to 3m (6.6ft to 9.8ft)

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Aconitum napellus

My next treat needs careful placement in the garden - it's as eye catching as it is poisonous, like many other plants, so be careful to plant it well out of harm's way and handle with gloves. *Aconitum napellus*, commonly known as wolfsbane, or monk's hood, is a herbaceous perennial that towers above borders from late summer into autumn in a sheltered, partially shaded border. Spires of striking, hood-shaped blooms in shades of violet and blue are most common, and look great planted amongst parchment-coloured ornamental grasses, including miscanthus, panicum or calamagrostis, or white, pink or rose-coloured Japanese anemones. H: 1.5m (4.9ft)

Heuchera 'Obsidian' and *H.* 'Midnight Rose'

Before we move onto pumpkins and gourds, which I'm legally obliged to include in my Halloween faves, my next frightful favourites are *Heuchera* 'Obsidian' and *H.* 'Midnight Rose'. Too scared of the consequences of singling one out, I've included them both! *Heuchera* 'Obsidian' boasts the darkest, purple-black, palmate foliage, whilst *H.* 'Midnight Rose' has similarly shaped dark-plum foliage splashed with an explosion of cerise space-dust, looking like stars sitting in the midnight sky. And, as if that wasn't enough, airy sprays of flowers held high on wiry stems appear in late spring to early summer. Heucheras are perfect specimens for pots and cauldrons - sorry - containers. Use planting partners with contrasting coloured foliage and textures for the darker-leaved varieties for best effect. Heucheras are also ideal edge of border or patio providing year-round colour and interest. H:50cm (19.6in)

Above left: **The dark and moody, cerise-splashed foliage of *Heuchera* 'Midnight Rose'** Above right: **As dark as the midnight, Halloween sky, *Heuchera* 'Obsidian' is a perfect plant for containers or border edges**

© Shutterstock

Pumpkins (of course)

As promised, here's my top, Halloween highlight - pumpkins! For an archetypal All Hallow's Eve pumpkin, consider *Cucurbita pepo* 'Howden', its size, approximately 8 to 12kg (17.6lb to 26.4lb), and orange skin lending itself perfectly for carving sinister, jagged-toothed, lopsided smiles that grin manically from cold, spider-webbed porches. And of course, who doesn't love carving an artistic Halloween pumpkin! Just remember to make use of the delicious pumpkin flesh inside by turning it into pies or soup!

© Shutterstock

If you're looking for a pumpkin that'll really give the local 'trick or treaters' something to scream about, then try growing *Cucurbita pepo* 'Warty Goblin'. Smaller than the regular Halloween pumpkin 'Howden', mentioned above, 'Warty Goblin' will weigh in at approximately 4kg (8.8lb) per fruit. Its orange skin is blistered and blemished heavily like the complexion

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Creating a seasonal nature shelf brings the outside in and gives us time to ponder the beauty of the natural world

Top tip

When foraging, remember good foraging etiquette. Only take small amounts, take common items and not anything rare, and avoid anything you're not confident what it is. Plant ID apps can be helpful if you're unsure.

Gardening for wellbeing

In this monthly series, the fantastic folk at health charity **Thrive** offer a lovely project idea to help you find excuses to enjoy the nurturing potential of your garden

Project – Autumn nature shelf display

Duration: 30 to 60 minutes
Collecting and arranging items allows you to spend mindful, calm time with nature, noticing little details.

It helps us feel connected with the seasons and enjoy a sense of optimism that autumn is a beginning, not just an ending.

Admiring your nature shelf over time can spark positive memories about when you collected the items and where they came from.

Items you will need

- A suitable shelf or surface for your arrangement
- Autumnal nature items (see below for ideas)
- Additional decorations, eg small containers, bowls, stacked books (optional)
- Collecting bag/basket
- Scissors/secateurs (optional)

Forage for your display

There are lots of items you can find that would look lovely in a nature shelf display. Here are a few ideas to get you going:

- Acorns
- Conkers
- Dried flower heads
- Driftwood or small sticks
- Fallen leaves
- Feathers
- Grasses
- Herbs (in bunches)
- Moss
- Pinecones
- Pumpkins or squashes
- Rose hips
- Sycamore 'helicopters'

How to get started

Lots of places around the home could work for this display. A firmly fixed shelf is ideal, but a fireplace mantel or a section of a dresser or console could also work.

If possible, find a display area that doesn't get direct heat or sun. If it's roughly at eye level, it will be easier to create and view your display. If you have small children or pets, you might like to keep the display out of their reach.

Consider a theme

You can create a shelf display with whatever you find and like. Or, if you prefer to have some direction in advance, you could choose a theme, such as:

- Woodland (with pinecones, bark and moss)
- Harvest festival (with mini squashes, grains or cereals e.g. wheat bundles, fruits and berries)
- Seed heads and grasses
- Coastal (with driftwood, shells or mermaid's purse egg cases)

Gather your items

It's time to head outside and see what you can find! You could take a stroll around your garden, if you have one. Or, you could go to a nearby green space.

You might find it helpful to take a bag or basket to store your finds in. If you are planning to collect plant materials, such as seed heads or rose hips, scissors or secateurs may be needed. Store them safely when not in use.

Don't forget something to carry your findings home in

© Thrive

Above: Dried grasses and seedheads bring a delicate beauty to collections

Time to get creative

You can arrange your display however you like. These are some design tips you might like to consider:

- Have taller items at the back and smaller ones at the front
- Small items may need containing, e.g. bowls for acorns and conkers
- You could add extras such as micro-string lights or battery-powered candles

Once you've finished, stand back and admire your creation. You've made a personal display from your home from what nature offers!

How to reach out to others

These are some ways to make creating your nature shelf display a shared activity:

- Take a walk with someone else to collect items.
- Suggest the idea to others and do nature item swaps, helping each other add to your individual shelf displays.
- Work with someone else to arrange items on the shelf and talk about the different items and what you notice about them.

Would you like more wellbeing inspiration?

Thrive is a gardening for health charity that supports people to transform their lives through gardening.You can find out more wellbeing gardening activities through their Cultivating Wellbeing app which helps you garden your way to better health. *www.thrive.org.uk/cultivatingwellbeing*

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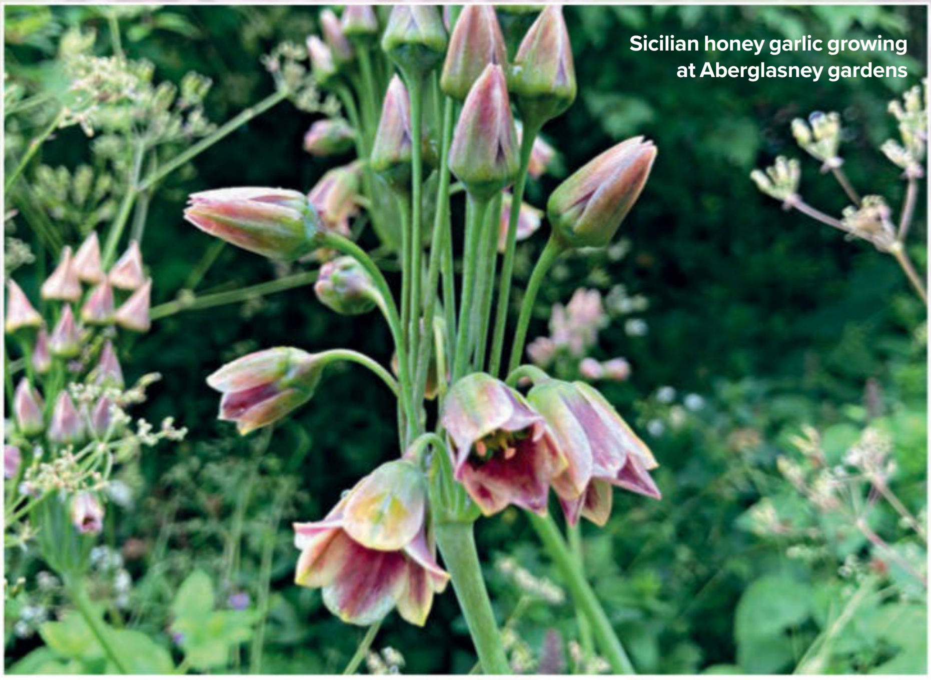
Bright ideas for bulbs to plant this autumn

Liz Zorab explains how to get set for spring by filling pots and troughs with the promise of colour to come



Sicilian honey garlic growing at Aberglasney gardens

How often do we see certain flowers in spring and summer and wish that we had planted some? I have an annual cycle of seeing a wonderful flower and making a mental note to plant some of the bulbs in autumn and, invariably, I'll forget. Now is an ideal time to plant bulbs for flowers next year and as I write, I am making a shopping list.

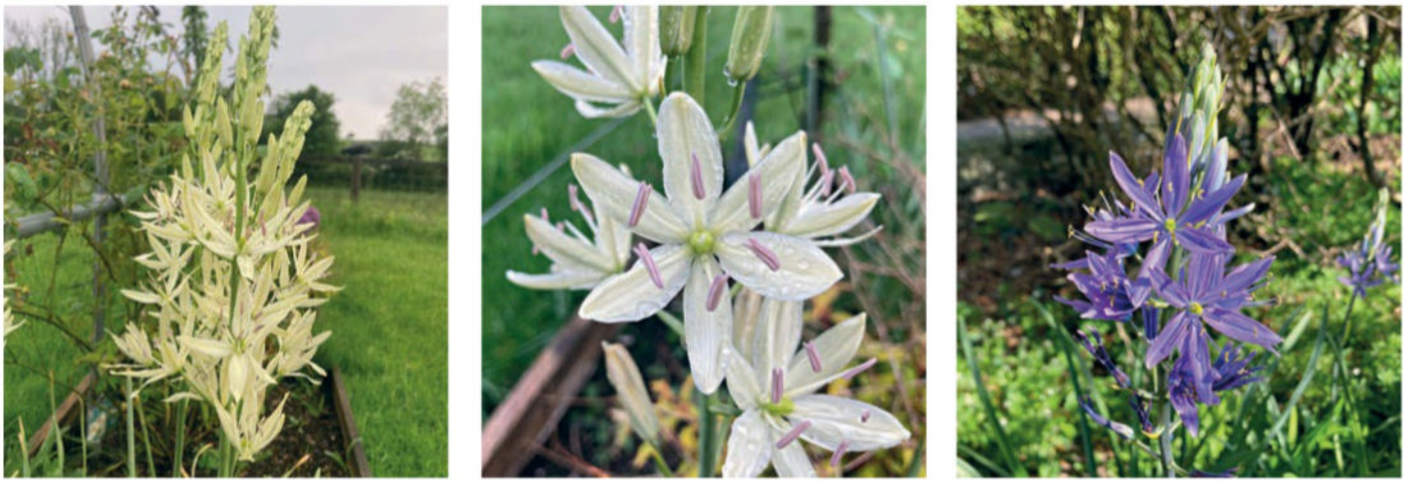
If you are unsure how deep to plant bulbs, a good guide is to measure the height of the bulb (I use my trowel for this) and plant so that there is double the depth of soil above the top of the bulb. It doesn't need to be precise, although planting too shallow can result in some plants coming up 'blind'. In other words, the leaves grow, but do not produce a flower stem, and it would be a shame to go to all the effort of planting the bulbs and then not getting the display you'd hoped for!

Camassia leichtlinii subsp. *leichtlinii*

Camassias are easy to grow and naturalise quickly. I grow two varieties, one purple and one white, commonly sold as 'Alba', and prefer the white as the creamy-white flowers stand out so well in the spring sunlight. They grow on any soil, except clay, in full sun or partial shade. They are hardy throughout most of UK and Ireland. They can grow to 120cm (47in) in height, although I've never seen them that tall because in my garden, plants rarely exceed 90cm (35in). If you want to increase numbers, be careful not to remove seed heads too quickly and beware when weeding as the young plants can easily be mistaken for grass.

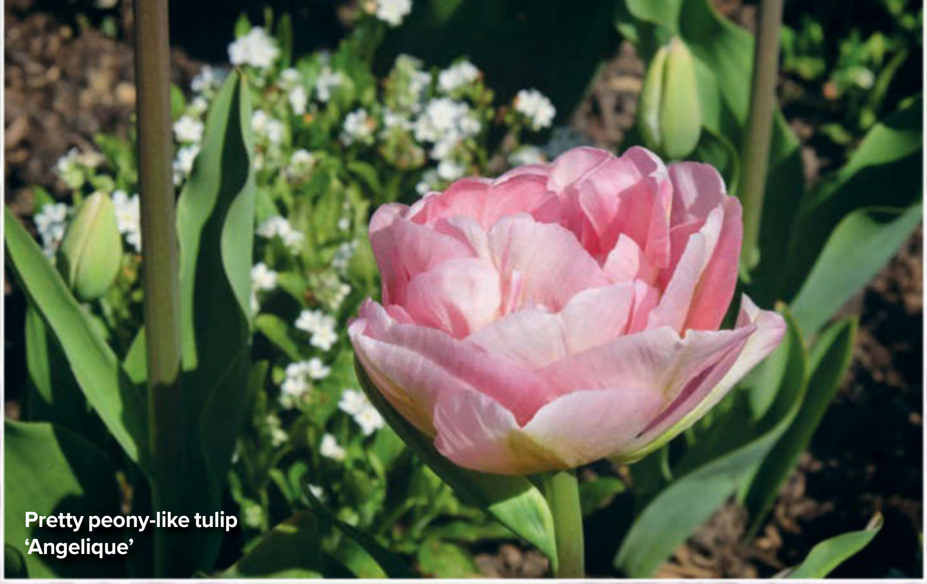
Allium siculum

Sicilian honey garlic is an unusual allium that flowers at the end of spring and into early summer. Not only does it give an interesting flower display, the seed pods in late summer are also decorative. Grow in any soil that is moist but well-drained. It is drought-tolerant and hardy across most of the UK and Ireland, even during a severe winter. Height 120cm (47in). You may also find this plant for sale as *Allium nectaracsardium* or *Nectaroscordum siculum*. As its common name suggests, Sicilian honey garlic has edible leaves and flowers, but be wary, not all alliums are edible, so make sure you know what you are eating!



Above: White and purple camassias grow in Liz's garden

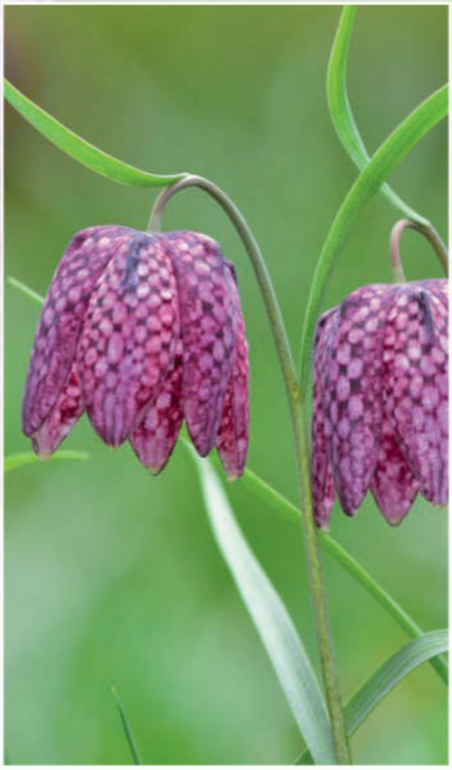
All images unless otherwise credited: Liz Zorab



Pretty peony-like tulip 'Angelique'

© Shutterstock

Above: Liz with *Narcissus* 'Bridal Crown' in her polytunnel



Above: The delicate checkerboard-like blooms of snake's head fritillary

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Narcissus 'Bridal Crown'

If you have space to position a pot of bulbs near to your door, this variety is well worth considering. The flower stem grows to 50cm (19.6in) in height, so if you live on a very windy site, it is best in a slightly sheltered position to prevent the wind knocking them over. The flowers are fully double, with creamy, almost white petal-like segments, while the central part is yellow and cream. 'Bridal Crown' flowers in mid-spring. Grow in any soil type and position, in full sun or partial shade. Hardy across the UK and northern Europe.

Tulipa 'Angelique'

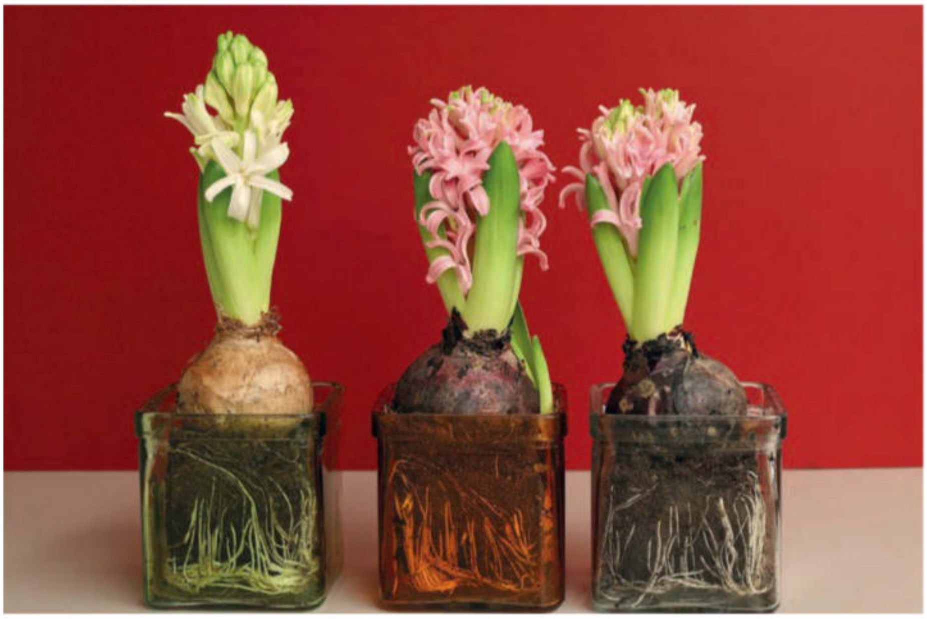
This is a late-flowering, fully double tulip that resembles a peony flower. The soft pink flowers appear during late spring. Grow in moist but well-drained soil in full sun. Height 45cm (17.7in). They are fully hardy across the UK and Ireland. If squirrels are regular visitors to your garden, they can be a nuisance when it comes to tulip and crocus bulbs. The bulbs provide a tasty meal for them and squirrels may dig up your potential flower display to eat them. You can protect the bulbs by completely encasing them in 13mm (0.5in) chicken wire or hardware cloth (which is made from a grid of wires). The leaves and flower stems will grow through the holes in the wire casing.

Hyacinth

As school, we placed hyacinth bulbs into specially designed glass containers that allowed us to watch the roots growing in water, while the leaves and flower stem followed shortly afterwards. I was delighted to find that similar growing kits can still be found. They use 'prepared' bulbs that have been treated to encourage flowering around mid-winter. While it might be a little late for Christmas flowering, if you plant them now, you could have these sweet-smelling blooms flowering inside your home early in the next year. Depending on variety, they will need eight to 12 weeks of cool, dark conditions, followed by two to three weeks of warmth and light. Alternatively, buy bulbs that have not been prepared for indoor growth and enjoy them in your garden.

Fritillaria meleagris

They may only grow to 30cm (11.8in) in height, but snake's head fritillaries certainly make a statement in the garden in spring. The fragile-looking flowers nod on top of slender stems, swaying in the wind. Each tepal has a striking checkerboard pattern. Squares or rectangles are not very often seen in nature's patterns and designs, so these markings look particularly special. Both the purple and white varieties have the markings, although this is less easily seen on the white flowers. They are unfussy about soil type or location and will thrive in full sun and partial shade. *Fritillaria meleagris* is hardy across the UK and Ireland, even during a severe winter.



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Why not watch with wonder and awe as the roots of hyacinth grow inside a glass pot

The regal lily lives up to its name with towering majestic flowers

Above: The Persian lily grows well in well-drained soils with full sun

Lilium regale

For height and impact, try this towering regal lily. You will need neutral or acid soil for it to thrive, and it likes a sheltered spot in full sun. Growing anything from one to two metres (3ft 2ins to 6.6ft) tall, with flowers up to 14cm (5.5in) long, it will certainly make a statement in your garden. It's hardy across the UK and northern Europe and has received the RHS Award of Garden Merit. This plant can be susceptible to red lily beetle, which you can remove by hand if you see them. Alternatively, encourage natural predators, including parasitic wasps, by growing a diverse range of plants in your garden.

Fritillaria persica

Here's an interesting flower for well-drained soils in full sun. Persian lily needs a south or east-facing spot and will not thrive on clay soils. If you can provide the right conditions, it will reward you with upright stems with brown to deep purple flowers in spring. Height 60cm (23.6in) to 90cm (35in) depending on variety. It is hardy throughout most of the UK but may not survive a harsh winter.

Muscari botryoides 'Album'

The small, delicate flowers of grape hyacinth are most often seen in shades of mauve and blue, but there are also pink and white varieties. For scented flowers to edge a south-facing pathway or front of border, they are ideal. They are clump-forming bulbs that grow to 20cm (7.8in) in height. They are unfussy about soil type and prefer full sun. The leaves die back for summer and reappear in autumn. I find the leaves of muscari rather scruffy after they have flowered, perhaps I am too impatient while they absorb sufficient energy from the sun to flower again next year. When we first moved to our home, I grew them in pots and planted them out when they were in flower, so I could decide exactly where I wanted them.

Lilium martagon

Turk's cap lily forms a clump of erect stems and produces flowers that hang downwards with petals that curl back so you can see the delightful markings on the insides. Grow in full sun or partial shade, they are unfussy about soil but won't like being in dry or waterlogged ground. Position in a sheltered spot to protect from wind. These plants are hardy across the UK and northern Europe. Height varies with variety and ranges from 90cm (35.4in) to 150cm (4.9ft) while the white variety can reach 200cm (6.6ftin) and 30cm (11.8in) spread.

Leucojum aestivum 'Gravetye Giant'

Commonly known as the summer snowflake, in mid to late spring these bulbs produce slightly fragrant flowers to 90cm (35.4in) in height. Unfussy about soil type or aspect, they thrive in full sun in moist soil, although not in a constantly waterlogged place. Their delicate appearance is deceptive as they are fully hardy across the UK and the rest of northern Europe. If you have the space, plant in a drift, and allow the leaves to die back naturally to ensure the bulbs receive sufficient energy to produce flowers again the next year. I associate this flower form with tiny snowdrops and snowflakes and seeing them as taller plants challenged my preconceptions. It just goes to show that in the garden, you really can learn something new every day!

Above: The marvellous flowers of clump-forming grape hyacinth plants

Above: Turk's cap lily is a very pretty plant from the mountain meadows of Switzerland. It is poisonous so do take care when you plant

Above: Summer snowflake can be planted in drifts for a spectacular spring display

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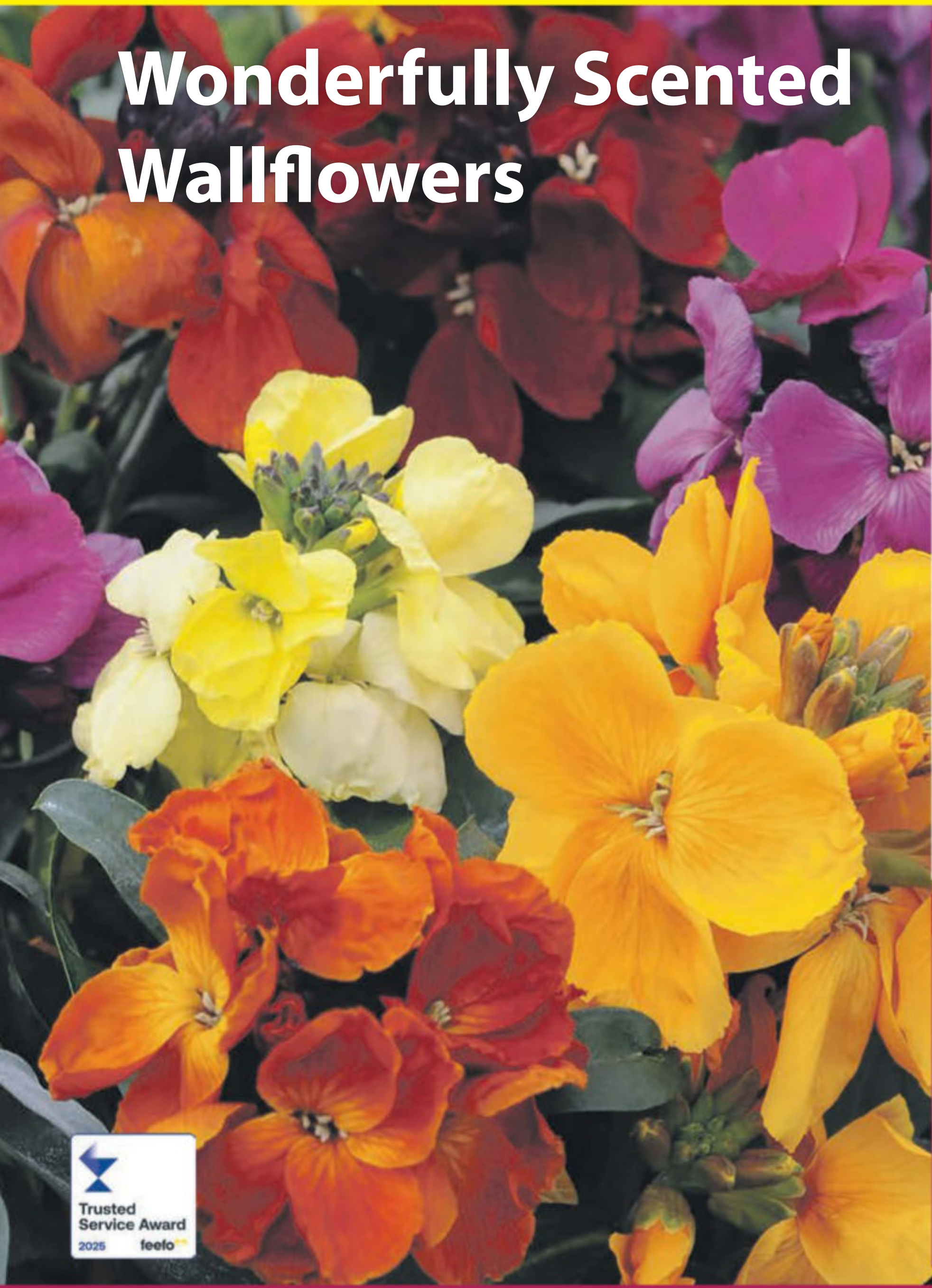

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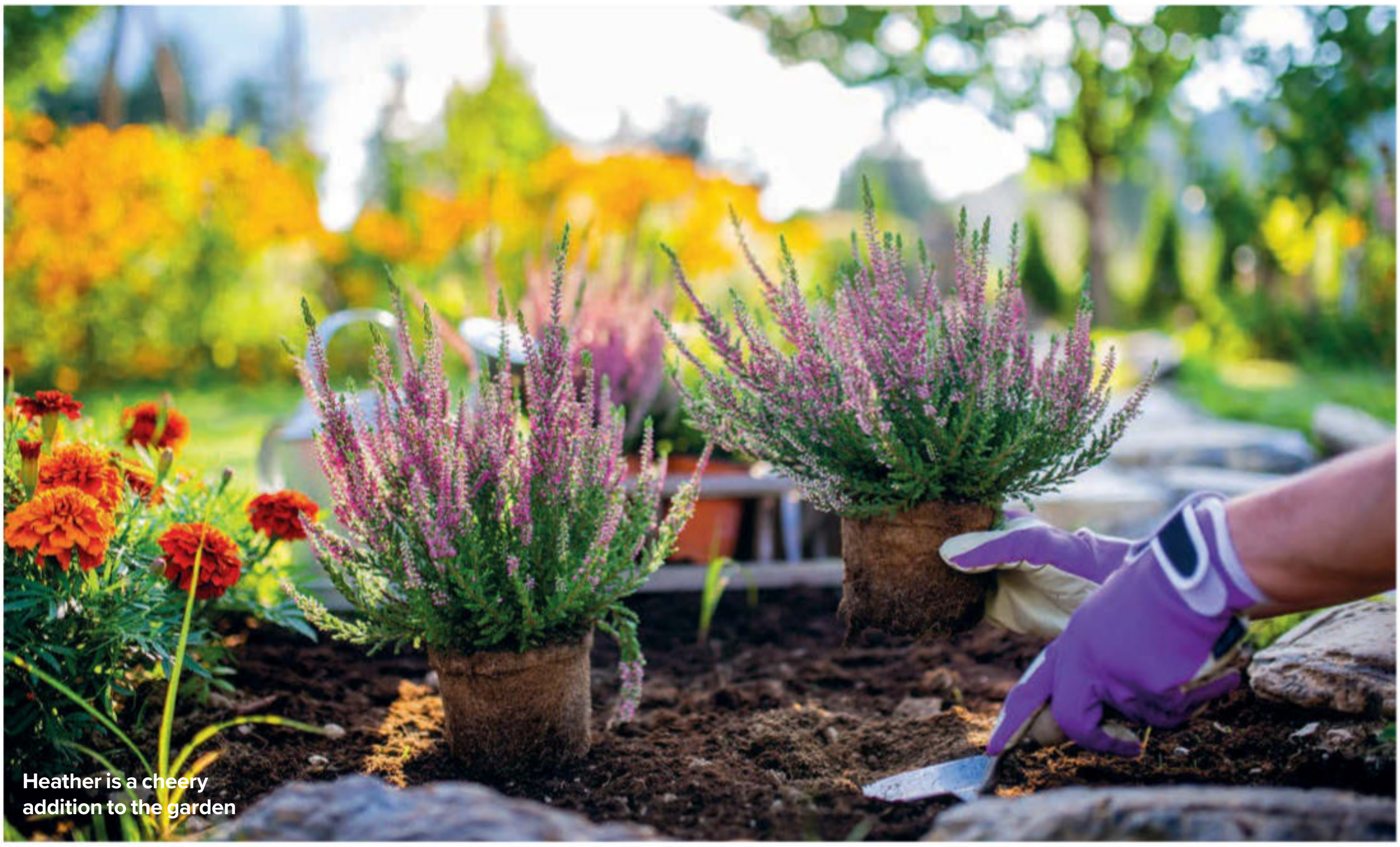
Rosie's retro revival


Heather is a cheery addition to the garden

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Why it is high time for a heather revival

Rosie Irving explains the many virtues of the humble heather

All images unless otherwise credited: Rosie Irving

Some might think it's going to be an uphill struggle to convince you that the heather is long overdue a revival, but I'm quietly confident that I can open your eyes to its many charms. So go on, indulge me, please, and read to the end!

There are probably three main reasons why heather is not currently more widely grown in gardens:

- The assumption that all heathers need an acidic soil to grow well.
- Its currently unpopular association with growing *en masse* in island beds cut out of the lawn.
- And finally, the truly awful practice of some garden centres selling heather plants sprayed with artificial colour!

Think about it though, most of us sigh and swoon in delight when we come across a vast expanse of heather in full flower growing on heath or moorland, so why can't we appreciate its beauty scaled down in our own gardens?

Bucking the 'out of fashion trend' are 'lone wolves' expressing their love for heathers, such as 38-year-old Matthew Pottage, Head of Horticulture at The Royal Parks and before that, the youngest-ever curator of RHS Wisley, earning him the

A swathe of heather is a sight to behold

© Lois GoBe / Shutterstock

Above: Colourful low-flowering heather with a small cordyline tree (left) and with strawflowers (right) at RHS Wisley

title 'the whizz kid of Wisley'. Matthew is a big fan of heathers and during his tenure at Wisley, redesigned and rejuvenated the garden's dated island heather beds beautifully by cleverly mixing them with plants such as the exotic spoon flower (*Dasylirion wheeleri*), upright, narrow conifers and trendy straw flowers (*Xerochrysum bracteatum, syn. Helichrysum bracteatum*).

There are three main UK species of heather colonising UK marshes, heath and moorland: ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) and bell heather (*Erica cinerea*), found on drier ground, and cross-leaved heather (*Erica tetralix*), happiest in damper areas. All three species are ideal choices for wildlife gardens and borders, providing nectar and pollen for various pollinating insects, as well as nesting sites and protective cover for a range of birds and mammals.

History of heather

Heather has been a defining feature of UK wild heath and moorlands for thousands of years. Following the last Ice Age, it colonised rocky and heath landscapes, creating the iconic moors and heathlands we know and love today.

© Jelena Yukka / Shutterstock

Above: Honey from bees that have foraged heather is a gourmet delight

Did you know?

In days gone by, Scottish Highlanders used heather as a medicine, making an infusion of heather tops to help treat coughs and soothe nerves. Always seek advice before trying natural remedies, however.

Heather flowers are an important food source for several species of butterflies and moths, including the small emperor moth.

Generally speaking, heathers that flower during the winter and spring months grow well in neutral to alkaline soil, exactly the time when we most need to see cheerful flowers in the garden.

Although heathers have fallen out of fashion in recent years, I believe their time has come again. Year-round foliage, carpets of colour and a vital role in feeding pollinators make these tough little plants perfectly in tune with modern gardening. Easy, enduring and endlessly charming, it's time to bring heathers back into the spotlight!

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Where to grow

Most heathers need an acidic soil to grow well, although many will tolerate a neutral soil and some, an alkaline one. Do your research before choosing varieties and/or check with the plant nursery or garden centre.

They need good drainage and mostly full sun, although some will tolerate light or part shade.

They are not keen on plants flopping onto them or crowding them out, so they're best planted in small groups of the same cultivar in curving waves to give a wonderfully informal, natural effect, or spaced out in gravel gardens and rockeries. If, however, you have a large area available, then create your own mini moorland by planting *en masse*.

They can be planted at any time of the year as long as the soil isn't waterlogged or frozen.

Give them an annual light trim and use the trimmings to add to a seasonal wreath, or place them together in the garden to create a mini over-wintering habitat for small mammals.

Heathers are a brilliant choice for coastal gardens due to their ability to tolerate salt spray.

They make long-lived edging plants, especially if using the same cultivar.

There are also low-growing cultivars for ground cover and hanging baskets.

Historic uses

The branches of heather were woven into brooms and baskets as well as being used as thatching for roofs and for stuffing mattresses. The flowers helped bees produce delicious, aromatic honey (still prized to this day), flavoured ale and made a natural dye for wool.

Victorian vision

The United Kingdom is naturally home to six species of heather and, although a large number of *Erica* species were introduced from the South African Cape in the 1700s, their frost tenderness meant that it was to be another 100 years before breeders successfully produced hardy, colourful cultivars in shades from blush pink to deep purple, in the process turning them into sought-after ornamental favourites.

White heather was prized as a charm

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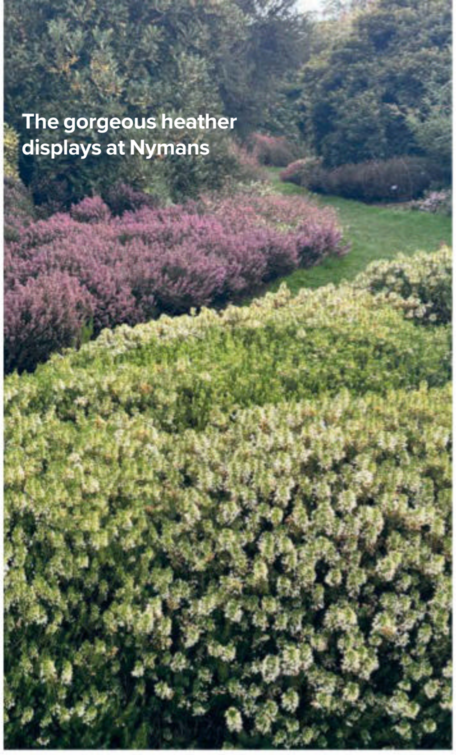
The gorgeous heather displays at Nymans

against misfortune and Queen Victoria's servant, Mr Brown, would often jump off his horse to pick a sprig or two.

Blooming brilliance

Heathers continued to grow in popularity and, by the early 1900s, the West Sussex garden Nymans was one of the first in the UK to plant out a large area with ericas. The heather garden survives to this day, now planted with a varied mix of spring, summer, autumn and winter-flowering types, delighting visitors with a year-round display of heather flowers.

The craze for heathers peaked in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s, at a time when Norfolk nurseryman Adrian Bloom, of Bressingham Gardens fame, was breeding a new batch of visually striking cultivars. He planted them out in sweeping curves in large, newly fashionable island beds, inspiring gardeners across the UK to see them as stars of the border rather than just 'fillers'.

The extent of the humble heather's fall from grace, however, is highlighted by the fact that in the 1980s, The Heather Society boasted membership of around 1,500, but, sadly, by 2020 it had ceased to exist.

High time for heathers - why they deserve to be revived

They offer year-round flowers

A brilliant reason for welcoming heathers into your garden is that, with the right choices, you can have heathers in flower in your garden all year round!

Winter and spring *Erica carnea and Erica* x *darleyensis* (any soils)
Spring, summer and autumn *Daboecia ssp* (acid soil)
Summer to autumn *Erica vagans* (any soil) and *Calluna vulgaris* (acid soil)

5 of the best

Erica arborea (Tree heather)

Tree heathers, unlike their low-growing cousins, can reach varying heights of several metres, making great focal points in the garden or, alternatively, a very effective evergreen hedge with the added bonus of their flowers attracting numerous bees and butterflies.

Why not go big and bold with a beautiful, tall evergreen tree heather smothered in scented white flowers hanging in long panicles from February to May with an ultimate height and spread of 250cm (8ft 2in) x 1m (3ft 3in). It should grow well if given free-draining, acidic or neutral soil and full sun or part shade, and would be equally happy growing near or under the canopy of a taller tree.

Calluna vulgaris 'Firefly' (Heather)

© Ashwood Nurseries

This is one of the cultivars whose leaves change colour throughout the year providing maximum interest in even the smallest of growing spaces. During the growing season the foliage is a warm gold-bronze colour which changes to stunning orange-red during the winter months. Oh, and it produces fuchsia-pink flowers from August to October. Its height and spread of 30cm (1ft) x 45cm (1.5ft) makes it an ideal choice for ground cover, edging pathways and/or rockeries, but do be sure to give it moist, acid, well-drained soil.

Daboecia x *scotica* 'William Buchanan' (Irish heath)

This dark green-leaved, compact heather has a naturally neat shape and produces charming magenta-coloured flowers from late spring all the way through to the autumn. It will grow in well-drained neutral as well as acid soil in full sun with a height and spread of 50cm (1ft 8in).

Erica carnea f. *alba* 'Springwood White' (Springwood White heather)

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'Springwood White' is very low growing with a trailing habit, covered, as its name suggests, with bright white racemes of flowers making it perfect for hanging baskets as well as ground cover. Found in 1925 by Scottish gardener Anna Walker whilst travelling in Italy, it is an extremely low-growing, wonderful old variety with a height and spread of 15cm (6in) x (45cm (1.5ft). It's happy in either full sun or part shade if given acidic, moist, well-drained soil, or ericaceous compost if growing in a hanging basket or container.

Erica x *darleyensis* 'Ghost Hills' (Winter heath heather)

© Ashwood Nurseries

A tough, low-growing plant covered in pretty pinkish-purple flowers from late winter until mid-spring; a time of the year when flowers not only lift the spirits of humans but also provide a great source of nectar for pollinating insects. Another bonus is that darleyensis and its cultivars will all grow happily in alkaline soil. Height and spread 50cm (1ft 8in) x 1m (3ft 3in).

Rosie in front of *Daboecia* x *scotica* 'William Buchanan'

We can rethink how to incorporate heathers into the garden

The main problem might be how the plant is used rather than the look of it.

Buy several of the same cultivar or species and repeat plant in groups throughout the border, rather than devoting a whole section to just heathers.

Place heathers with plants that won't bully them for space, such as hellebore, and remember, if you don't have acidic soil, choose alkaline-tolerant types such as *Erica* x *darleyensis* and you'll then have a much wider choice of suitable plants for combining with heathers.

Above: *Erica* x *darleyensis* growing in Rosie's garden

I found a great way of growing them by planting on top of, and at the edge of, a low(ish) brick wall. The plants come into flower in late winter, blooming for weeks on end; an utterly charming sight with soft pink flowers and loose-stemmed foliage draping elegantly over the wall. Scented too. Bees and other pollinators adore them and they are a much-needed late winter source of food for them, as well as creating a joyous sight for you, the gardener. To my mind there is nothing more delightful than the sight of sun highlighting those pretty flowers on a crisp early spring morning.

There are so many more advantages as heathers are:

- Mostly pest and disease free.
- Evergreen.
- Provide year-round interest.
- Offer many species and cultivars flowering for months on end.
- Extremely low maintenance.
- Able to cope with harsh conditions; an important factor in this day and age.
- Many are remarkably tolerant of droughts once established.
- They are ecological heroes, supporting biodiversity in gardens as well as in the wild. Their flowers are an important food for pollinators at times of the year when plants in flower are generally scarce.
- The foliage of many turn glorious shades of orange red and yellow during the winter months.
- They are currently remarkable value for money, (probably due to being out of fashion), so you won't have to spend a fortune to add these pots of joy to your borders and/or containers.
- Don't forget that there are species that will grow well in alkaline soil.
- Like most plants, if they're planted in a creative way they look totally beautiful. So I'd say unleash your creative juices and give them a go!

Strawflowers look fantastic growing among heathers

Good plant companions

Create instant impact by adding shrubs of various heights such as the pretty, light pink and scented flowering *Abelia ssp* or the vibrant, small purple-berried *Callicarpa bodinieri* var. *giraldii* 'Profusion' for autumn/winter interest; pieris and fothergilla for spring interest and callistemon for summer flowers.

Imagine how charming a group of winter-flowering heather would look underplanted at the base of a deciduous tree like a silver birch (*Betula ssp*) or Juneberry (*Amelanchier spp*).

As mentioned previously, summer-flowering strawflowers look gorgeous growing amongst heathers and their slim shape won't overcompete for space. Plus there's the added bonus of the flowers of both making great dried flower displays at the end of the growing season.

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Above: Also *Callicarpa bodinieri* var. *giraldii* 'Profusion'

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Your GARDENING TEA BREAK

Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, **Graham Clarke**

Darling daffs

For many of us, daffodils are the highlight of our gardens from late February. We are slap-bang in the middle of the daffodil planting season, so let's look at some daff facts.

- Surprisingly, Cornwall is the world's largest producer of daffodils, growing more than 30 million tonnes of bulbs each year; its farms are some of the largest and most efficient anywhere, selling bulbs across the UK and exporting them to Europe and the USA.

Three golden daffodil rules

1. When planting, the effect is so much better if you set the bulbs in large, distinct groups (particularly if you are 'naturalising' them in a lawn) rather than setting them randomly or individually. Most varieties should clump up from being planted about 10cm (4in) apart. A little further than this and the planting would look 'casual'; much further, and the result would appear thin and sparse.
2. Gardeners used to cut back the foliage after flowering, or tie it into bunched stalks. We don't do this now, as both practices inhibit the replenishment of the bulb's starchy food reserves, which is critical to future flowering.
3. Do not eat daffodil bulbs – they are poisonous. My favourite old daffodil joke: *A group of people are in hospital because they ate daffodil bulbs. It's alright. They'll be out in the spring!*

Wow! I didn't know that...

- The daffodil and the leek are both emblems of Wales because they are similar in the Welsh language: *Cenhinen* is leek; *Cenhinen Pedr* is daffodil.
- Established daffodils (and many other flowering bulbs) can easily push their shoots through recently laid asphalt.
- In 1898, daffodil 'Will Scarlet' was bred by Rev George Engleheart. With its bright orange centre, it marked the first red colouring breakthrough. Because of this, three bulbs changed hands for £100 (around £11,900 at today's rate).

This fortnight in gardening history

17 Oct 1922 The first play ever to be performed on the radio, *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand, was broadcast from 2MT Writtle in Essex, an experimental Marconi station on the site of what is today Writtle University College (a leading establishment for horticultural education).

19 Oct 2013 According to *Guinness World Records*, the most jack-o'-lanterns in one place at one time – 30,581 – were carved by citizens of the City of Keene, New Hampshire, USA. Keene was the original record holder, and has overtaken its record eight times since 2013.

23 Oct 1921 John Boyd Dunlop, inventor of the pneumatic tyre (millions of which have been affixed to gardeners' wheelbarrows over the years), died.

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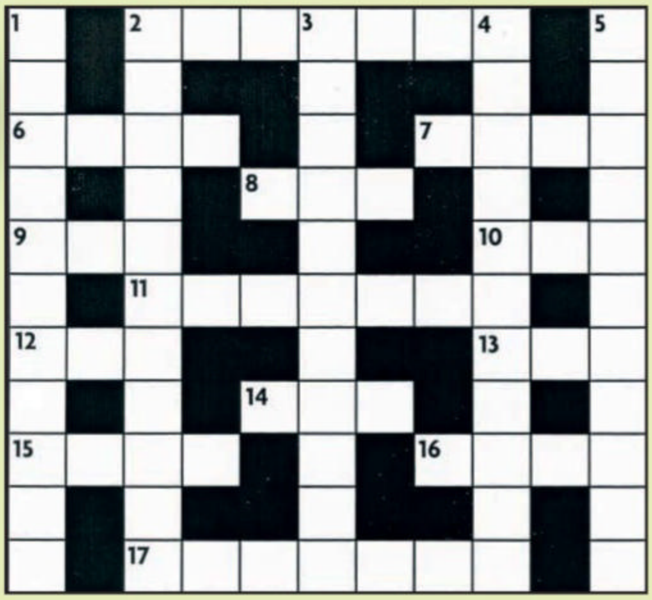
Crossword... *just for fun!*



ACROSS

2 Plants of the *Hedychium* and *Zingiber* generas may be referred to as these (7)

6 Crest of a hill, as in the flowering quince variety '_____ Hill Scarlet' (4)

7 Small, soft plants known botanically as musci – including sphagnum (4)

8 Next Sunday (26 Oct) the clocks go back to this (1,1,1)

9 National Garden Scheme (1,1,1)

10 Farewell remark found in a stubby erica! (3)

11 Hot variety of pepper (7)

12 French vineyard producing wine of high quality, sometimes classified as either a Great Growth (*Grand* ____) or a First Growth (*Premier* ____) (3)

13 Decompose three-quarters of a root! (3)

14 Unit of heat, found in cockscomb tufts! (1,1,1)

15 Narrow, thin strip of wood used to make lattice fencing, or as backing for plaster (4)

16 Archipelago of some 800 islands in the South Pacific, whilst *Pritchardia pacifica* is the _____ fan palm (4)

17 Common name for garlic plants (*Allium ursinum*), having broad leaves (7)

DOWN

1 Genus of ornamental grasses, including the golden Japanese forest grass (11)

2 A lawn mower! (11)

3 Latin name for creeping avens (4,7)

4 Several shrubs of the *Symphoricarpos* genus (11)

5 Inert swedes make a still, sweet alcoholic drink often served with a pudding! (7,4) (anag)

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD ABOVE

ACROSS 2 Gingers 6 Knap 7 Moss 8 GMT 9 NGS 10 Bye 11 Cayenne 12 Cru 13 Rot 14 Btu 15 Lath 16 Fiji 17 Ramsons **DOWN** 1 Hakonechloa 2 Grasscutter 3 Geum reptans 4 Snowberries 5 Dessert wine

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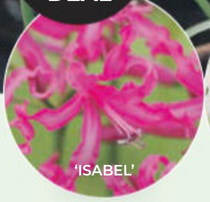
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'PINK'

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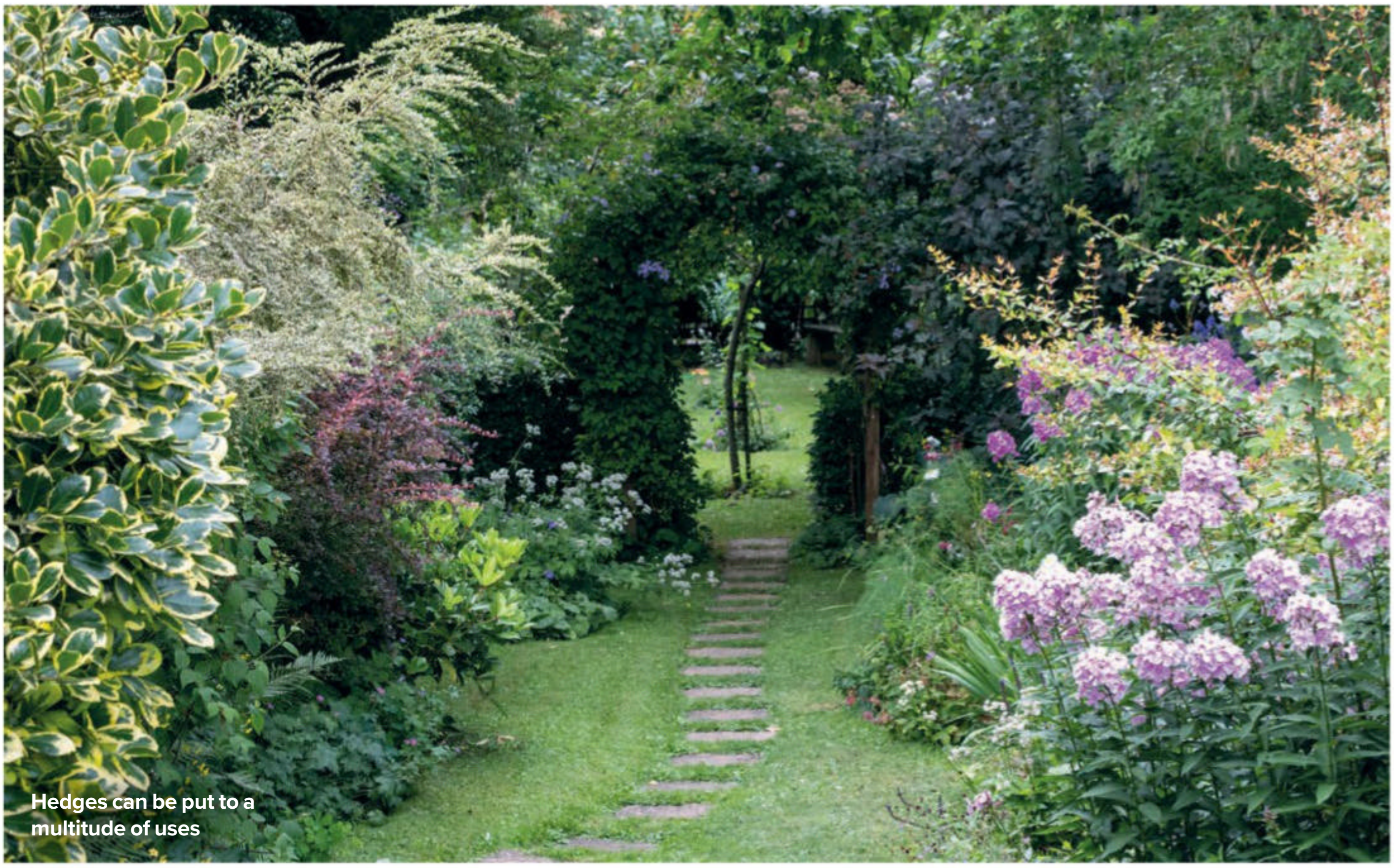
THE SELF-SUFFICIENT (ish) GARDENER

with **Andrew Oldham**



Hedges can be put to a multitude of uses

© Shutterstock

How to grow your own hedge the thrifty way

Andrew Oldham explains how to save money and boost results with bare-root planting

All images unless otherwise credited: Andrew Oldham

Gardening doesn't stop as the temperature plummets and the daylight wanes. This is the perfect time of year to invest in a hedge as autumn heralds the start of the bare-root season. Compared with pot/cell grown hedging, bare-root plants can cost considerably less. The hornbeam hedge that surrounds my quarter acre garden was planted over a decade ago and cost less than £100. Today, the cost has risen to £190 but this is less than hedging grown in pots/cells which would have cost me £500.

Deciduous hedges are easier to work with

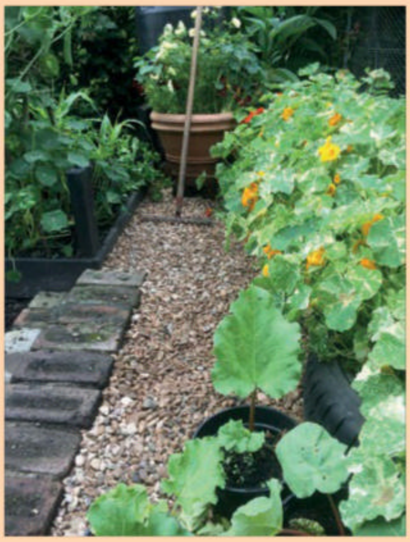
There are ups and downs to growing bare-root plants and I recommend for first-time hedge growers, deciduous hedges – these are plants that go dormant during autumn and winter and are less likely to suffer transplant shock. I recently planted 50 Irish yews, which make great hedging but come as evergreen bare-rooted plants. Some 18.3m (60ft) of hedging cost me over £230 and several of them showed signs of shock after planting – browning leaves and dead branches. Even though I planted at the right distance and depth, I lost a third. It is true that this last spring and summer did not help, rain was scarce and when it did turn up it came down with such force that it washed away the mulch. All is not lost though, the yew that established have provided me with cuttings for more.

Create a balance in the garden with companion planting to help protect edible crops

Andrew's hornbeam hedge eight years after planting

Future thinking –pollinators and companion plants

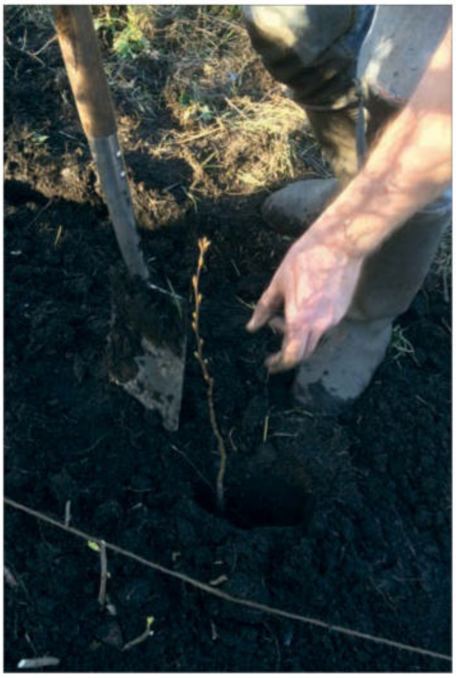
Plan your vegetable garden to include companion plants. Open flowers and foliage will attract everything from ladybirds to hoverflies. Using nasturtiums attracts cabbage whites to those leaves and not your brassicas. Calendula brings in numerous pollinators that benefit your crops. A garden is about balance and by companion planting, you will mask your crops from predators and restore the food chain in your garden.



Above: Grow nasturtiums to attract cabbage whites away from your brassicas

> "A good hedge will benefit both wildlife and garden as it will filter the winter winds, reducing damage to garden structures"

When I arrived my garden was full of laurel, which grows up to 0.6m (2ft) a year and is tricky to cut: trim too much and the hedge is dead, or ready to explode with violent growth. I swapped the laurel for hornbeam, hazel and hawthorn which grows up to 0.6 m to 1.3m a (2ft to 3ft) a year. However, my hedge regularly sprouts more growth than stated in the gardening books.



Above: Use a line to ensure hedging is straight

A hedge should be an impenetrable barrier and can be both beautiful and protective. The hawthorn is a particularly favourite of mine, beneficial for birds and insects but lethal to climb over. A good hedge will benefit both wildlife and garden as it will filter the winter winds, reducing damage to garden structures. Hedges take anything from five to 10 years to get to a desired height and deciduous are more forgiving for the novice hedge cutter.

How to prepare the soil and the site

A deciduous hedge will benefit from well-rotted manure or garden compost being forked into the area. Always clear out all perennial weeds. When the bare-rooted plants arrive, you should plant immediately but if you can't, heel them in. Heeling in means to dig a hole in the ground and lay down the hedging plants at a 45° angle, gently firming soil around the root ball, then watering.

Andrew planting his hornbeam hedging back in 2017

Use scaffold netting to help diffuse winter winds to protect evergreens from drying out

How to plant

I place the hedging plants in a bucket of water for up to 15 minutes. I then don gloves, especially if I am planting hawthorn, and push a spade down into the prepared soil. I waggle the spade, front and back, to make a slit in the soil and slide in the bare-rooted plant. I gently pull the spade away once the plant is in and gently firm in with my foot. I stagger rows, planting 20 to 30cm (8 to 12in) apart, but taking care to read the planting instructions that came with them! I then water the new hedge and mulch.

Evergreen hedging is different

When adding the well-rotted manure, I also add grit. Yew is a perfect example of a hedge that doesn't like to be wet or dry, and the manure, which retains moisture, won't become saturated if grit is added. Evergreens can also be victims of winter winds and I tend to use scaffold netting as a windbreak to allow the hedges to not dry out.

Hedges benefit from regular maintenance. I cut all my hedges in early September after the birds have stopped nesting and certainly before March, when the birds start again. Hedges are a living tapestry that brings nature in and lasts far longer than any fence.

Jobs for the fortnight

1. Plant bare-root hedging, roses, and shrubs, before the weather turns cold. The costs can be much cheaper and that means you can buy more!

2. Start to mulch around perennials. Add a thick layer of well-rotted garden compost to a border, up to 5 to 8cm (2 to 3in) inches deep. It is better to do a small area well, if you do not have enough compost, rather than a large area badly. Make sure the compost does not touch the crowns of the perennials.

3. Use cloches to protect winter peas and salads. Cloches can be made of anything, and I have in the past used clear plastic sheeting over wire hoops, old plastic bottles, and old window panes as A-frames. The cloche will protect the crop, and on warm days can be pulled back to create air circulation.

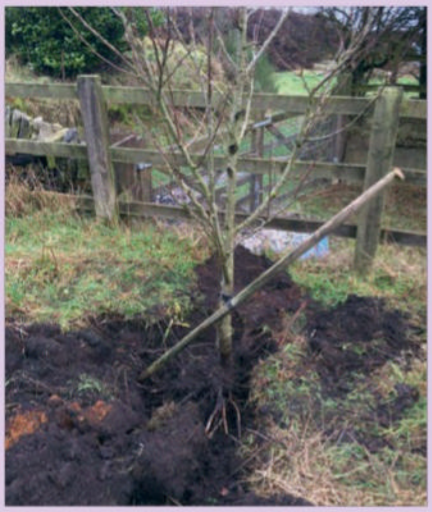
4. Plant garlic on the shortest day goes the old adage. You can stagger the rows and get more garlic into a small area. Break apart the garlic into individual cloves. Use a bulb planter and pop the clove in, pointy end up and cover. New growth will be seen by spring.

Fashion a cloche out of materials such as old water pipes and polythene sheeting to provide winter protection

Planting a bare-rooted fruit tree

You will need: a spade, garden compost, mycorrhiza, a stake, sledgehammer and a tree tie.

1. Remove the top few inches of soil or turf from the area you want to plant the tree in. Turf can be stacked grass side to grass side and left to rot down to get loam. Make sure the area is free of weeds up to a metre around the tree.
2. Dig a square hole and break up any hard areas below the hole. Mix the soil with the garden compost.



Above: A stake placed at 45° prevents damaging the roots

3. Place your bare-rooted tree in the hole and lay your spade flat from one side of the hole to the other. This will give you a line where the soil will be. You do not want the graft of the tree – you will see this between the roots and the stem, often a bump or a thicker section – below the soil level. If you live in a damp area, make sure the tree is planting on a slight mound.
4. Backfill with the soil/compost mix to get the tree at the right level.
5. Add mycorrhiza as this promotes better chance of survival for the tree. Mycorrhiza is a beneficial fungi that interacts with the root systems of trees. Sprinkle a spoonful on the roots and in the soil at the bottom of the hole.
6. Holding the tree upright, backfill with the soil/garden compost mix.
7. With the heel of your boot, gently firm in. Do not stamp the soil down!
8. Take a wooden stake and place at a 45° angle close to the tree, the top of the stake should face any prevailing wind. Use the sledgehammer to knock in the stake. The 45° angle avoids the roots.
9. Attach the tree tie to the tree and the stake. This should stop the tree from rubbing against the stake and will allow the top of the tree to flex in the wind but stops the roots from rocking.

About **Andrew Oldham**

■ Andrew Oldham is a self-sufficient(ish) gardener who believes in the joy of down-to-earth growing and cooking. He lives high on the Saddleworth hills with his family at Pig Row. Find him on all social media platforms as **@lifeonpigrow**

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Fresh or dried, rosemary is a must-have herb

Make room for rosemary

This versatile herb has so many beneficial uses says **Ellen Mary**

October provides many gifts in the garden, with flowers and harvests still on offer in between bare stems and colourful leaves. Some areas will have seen the first frosts and in others it's still warm enough to keep dahlias flowering and annuals hanging on for a little longer. I enjoy the transition in the vegetable garden as well, moving from summer vegetables to brassicas and roots. My herb patch is still full of green at this time of year but as recipes change to more winter warmers in the kitchen, so do the herbs collected for cooking. Whilst rosemary can be used for so many things all year round, it tends to be at this time of year when it truly shines.

I don't think there is a herb to beat rosemary when it comes to its combination of flavour and folklore. As a Mediterranean native, the name rosemary comes from the Latin *ros marinus* - meaning dew of the sea, however it was reclassified as *Salvia rosmarinus* after it was found to have similar DNA to the *Salvia* genus. The Latin for salvia is salveo, meaning to 'be well' or 'in good health'. Perhaps this is more fitting, since it has been used in rituals, religious ceremonies, arts, cooking and medicinal herbal remedies for as far back as records go. Rosemary has been used to remove unwanted smells, in embalming and at weddings and funerals. Some swear by it for reducing pain and inflammation, improving memory and cognitive function and much more besides. In 2022, it was used as part of the arrangement on HM Queen Elizabeth's coffin. It's easy to grow, aromatic, healing and great for pollinators - making it a must for wildlife and wellbeing in the garden in my book.

Soothing rosemary tea

A 10cm (3.9in) section of stem is recommended for cuttings

All images unless otherwise credited: Shutterstock

Rosemary is a magnet for bees

How to take cuttings

After flowering, snip off a 10cm (3.9in) non-flowering new shoot and remove the lower leaves so the stem is about two thirds bare. Cut off the bottom of the stem, just under a leaf node, and dip in rooting hormone (if you prefer) although root establishment can still happen without it. Then plant in small pots filled with a mix of compost and horticultural grit before placing them in a cool, sheltered place such as a cold frame. Multiple shoots can be planted, spaced apart around the edges of the pot and watered in well. Keep the compost moist but not overwatered. In spring, carefully separate the plants and begin to pot up. This is how my huge rosemary plant was started off and now it is wonderfully abundant.

You can also root cuttings in water which helps you to see when the roots have formed for planting on

Growing rosemary

Outside it is best to plant out in springtime after the last frosts, in a sunny bed with well-drained soil. Rosemary is such an easy plant to grow but hates having wet roots and is extremely drought tolerant.

TOP TIPS

- Grow in containers if you are in a particularly wet area of the country.
- Move containers to a sheltered place over winter.
- If growing on heavy soil, add in some horticultural grit or sand before planting.
- Mulching the soil around the plant in autumn, especially in colder areas, can be helpful.

Growing rosemary

Rosemary is an evergreen shrub, usually with small, bluish flowers. Ideally planted in a sunny position, it needs a well-drained home, but its hardy nature means it even grows in poor soils, exposed sites or near a windy coast. If growing in a container, just ensure it is lifted onto bricks or pot feet during the wetter weather in autumn. Rosemary easily handles cold temperatures but if there is sustained frost, a little extra shelter or protection will help.

Rosemary can be grown from seed, but it's a herb that takes a long time to both germinate and grow large enough to be able to harvest. Start off with small plants from a local nursery or ask a friendly neighbour if you can take a cutting. Rosemary cuttings are very simple to take, easy to root and save money.

Above: Rosemary growing on Ellen Mary's allotment

Above: Rosemary flowers are a lovely sight

Top harvesting tips

Harvest all year round by simply snipping stems as needed. The flavour and fragrance holds well if stored in a dark, well-ventilated place. Just as with most herbs, harvesting in the morning is best because this is when the oils are most concentrated.

- New stems in summer have the best flavour.
- Hang bunches of rosemary somewhere dry so that you can enjoy the scent before removing leaves to store.
- Rosemary tea is surprisingly nice and great for digestion.

If you have lots of herbs or are creating a herb garden, rosemary is a superb addition and grows well with other herbs such as sage, oregano, thyme and lavender. It can also be grown as a companion plant close to beans, brassicas and carrots as it will deter some pests.

After planting, water well but bear in mind that rosemary should only be watered, if necessary, during long dry

▶

Above: Ellen Mary harvests rosemary for the kitchen

© Ellen Mary

You can also grow rosemary inside on a windowsill over winter

spells. Mine is now well established and after a summer of very little rain and little watering from me, it's still thriving. To prevent it getting too woody, give it a prune after flowering, avoiding old wood, in late summer, This will help to keep it compact and in shape. Use what you have pruned for cooking and other projects.

Pests and diseases

The top 'pest' to look out for is the rosemary beetle, but it can barely be called a 'pest' because not only is it beautiful but it's also not particularly problematic unless there are lots of them. Try encouraging biodiversity in the garden so things take care of themselves. If rosemary beetle does become a problem, perhaps pick some off and rehome them! Rosemary can also get aphids, like most plants, but again, it's a hardy plant so these rarely become an issue.

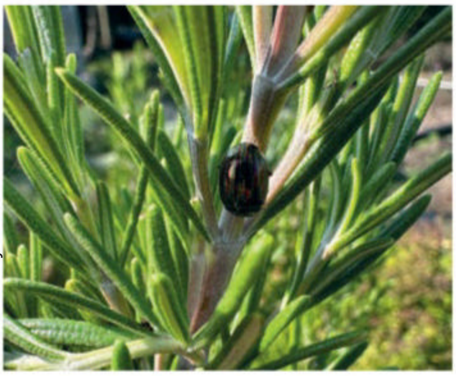
Poor drainage is the biggest problem as it can lead to root rot. Fungal diseases like powdery mildew can occur in humid weather, so ensure good air circulation by planting at least 45cm (17.7in) apart and aim for good air flow when pruning.

Wellbeing uses

Rosemary has been used for centuries, and for good reason. It's a herb rich in antioxidants and is anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, anti-fungal and simply full of goodness. Plus, the leaves are a source of calcium, iron, potassium and vitamins A, B and C. Perhaps used mostly for memory and cognitive benefits, how about swapping out one cup of coffee a day for a rosemary tea instead, add some lemon and it'll taste really refreshing. More recently, people have got very excited about buying rosemary oil on social media due to the reputed possibility of stimulating hair growth. Who knows?

Rosemary really can be used for so many things. I love to add the leaves to a butter/spread, chop and put them into an ice cube tray or use then for cooking. At this time of year, rosemary can be added to seasonal dishes; it tastes delicious with a mushroom wellington or roasted vegetables, and looks great as a sprig in a mocktail. It's a superb plant!

Always undertake thorough research when using herbal remedies. Rosemary oil is not recommended for those who are pregnant or breastfeeding.



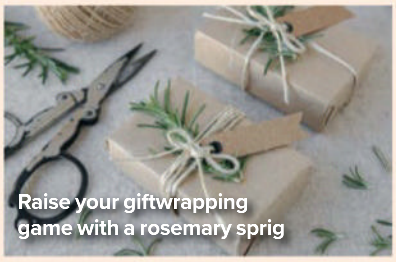
© Ellen Mary

Above: As pests go, rosemary beetles are not too much of a problem

Rosemary gift decoration

This is a lovely way to add a touch of the garden and blessings to your gifts - especially at Christmas. Cut some sprigs from your rosemary and make sure they are clean and dry, without any bugs attached!

- Wrap gifts with your choice of paper (brown paper looks lovely and is much more environmentally friendly than printed paper)
- Add some red or white ribbon, tying it so there is enough ribbon on top of the parcel to make into a bow. String works well too.
- Tie a sprig or two of rosemary into the bow and attach your gift tag.



Raise your giftwrapping game with a rosemary sprig

A sprig or two of rosemary lifts roast potatoes

Herby homegrown potatoes recipe

Harvesting potatoes is one of the most joyful gardening activities. They taste so good, but even better with rosemary. This is an easy but tasty recipe with homegrown goodies.

- Preheat the oven to 225°C (437°F) while rinsing the potatoes, leaving the skins on.
- Cut the potatoes into wedges and chop the rosemary leaves.
- Place the wedges and rosemary into a bowl with chopped garlic, sea salt and some olive oil.
- Lay the marinaded wedges onto a baking tray with parchment paper and bake for about 30mins or until the skins are crisp and the inside is soft and fluffy.

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GROWING FROM SEED

with **Ruth Hayes**

A new twist on a traditional favourite

The first green aquilegia will shine in the front of the border

We all have our favourite traditional plants and they all fully deserve their place in our hearts and gardens.

Take aquilegias for instance. Also commonly known as granny's bonnets, they are one of the most delightful biennials, or short-lived perennials, their nodding flowers sometimes ruffled, sometimes more simple, in shades of white, pink, mauve and blue.

One of the more intriguing varieties of aquilegia is 'Green Apples', a fairly new introduction with clematis-shaped blooms that have narrow petals in shades of very pale green.

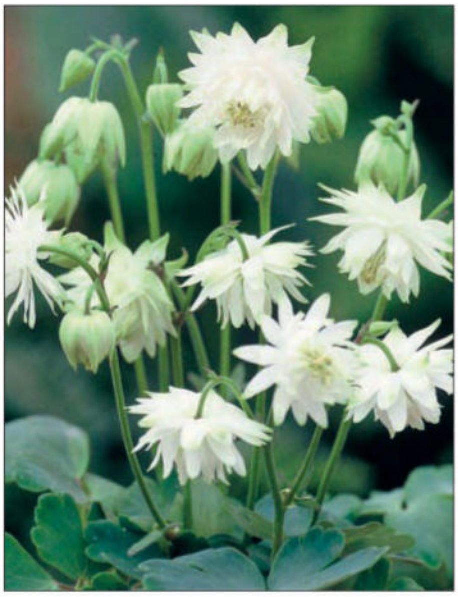
It is a stunning plant, happy in sun or dappled shade in a sheltered spot where it will shine out among the other flowers.

The nodding flowers that appear in late spring and early summer are held aloft on sturdy stems that grow to 80cm (31.5in), and this versatile plant is perfect for cottage gardens, ornamental beds and containers.

Sow seed now onto trays of dampened seed compost, and don't cover with more soil as light is needed for germination. Simply cover the tray with a lid or seal it in a clear plastic bag, which is removed once the seedlings appear.

When the young plants are large enough to handle, move them on into larger pots or modules and plant them out when they have been hardened off and the frosts have passed.

If you already have aquilegias growing in your garden, don't be surprised if they cross-pollinate with any 'Green Apples' you may grow, potentially producing some beautiful and unusual hybrids.



Above: This delicate green aquilegia, 'Green Apples', will be a wow in borders and pots

All images credit: © Shutterstock

The scent of summer

Sow sweet peas now for early blooms

- Sweet peas are one of the quintessential flowers of a summer garden, and the older heirloom varieties are the ones that really stand out with their prolific flowering and heady, instantly recognisable, perfume.
- Heirloom Mixed is a fabulous collection with plants growing to around 2.4m (8ft). If its plentiful flowers are picked every day, it will keep blooming right through summer, filling your garden and home with scent and colour.
- Sweet peas can be sown in autumn and because they are hardy, in theory they could go straight into the soil.
- However, if we have a cold, wet winter the seeds are likely to rot or be sniffed out and gobbled up by hungry mice, so they are best sown indoors in deep pots of seed compost.
- Alternatively, use specially adapted root trainers or even the cardboard inserts of toilet rolls and kitchen paper.
- Pinch out seedlings as they grow to stop them becoming leggy and tangled, and plant them out in late spring.

Sweet peas are plants that keep on giving

What's On

18/24 and 31 Oct: Thenford Autumn Garden Open Day, Thenford Gardens and Arboretum, in Northamptonshire, OX17 2BX. Explore this beautiful spot.

18 Oct: Plant Swap, Community Hub at Manchester Craft and Design Centre, 17 Oak Street, Manchester, M4 5JD. Exchange plants, seeds and cuttings and chat with other gardeners.

18 Oct: Easton Lodge Gardens October Open Day, Little Easton, Dunmow, Essex, CM6 2BD. Dahlias, a pumpkin trail, craft stalls and homemade cakes.

18 Oct: Cyclamen Show, RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey, GU23 6QB. Cyclamen displays and competition, plus plants and seed for sale.

19 Oct: National Collection of Hardy Chrysanthemums, Norwell Nurseries, Woodhouse Road, Norwell, Nottinghamshire, East Midlands, NG23 6JX. More than 1,000 varieties of rare plants for sale.

19 Oct: Apple Day, Cambridge University Botanic Garden, 1 Brookside, Cambridge, CB2 1JE. Tastings, crafts and more. If you would like your apples identified, please keep stalk and leaves attached.

19 Oct: Sheffield Plant Swap, Sheffield Botanical Gardens, Clarkehouse Road, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S10 2LN. 12.30-1.30pm. Come and swap, buy and browse.

25 Oct: Autumn Colour at Mellerstain, Mellerstain House and Gardens, Gordon, Scotland, TD3 6LG. Admire the autumn colours in the grounds.

25 Oct: Pumpkin Festival, Trading Store, Ormonde Road Allotment Site, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG41 2RB. Sale of spring bulbs, pumpkin-themed crafts and more.

26 Oct: The Great Comp National Garden Scheme Open Day & Plant Sale, Great Comp Garden, Comp Lane, Platt, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN15 8QS. Explore the gardens and buy unusual plants.

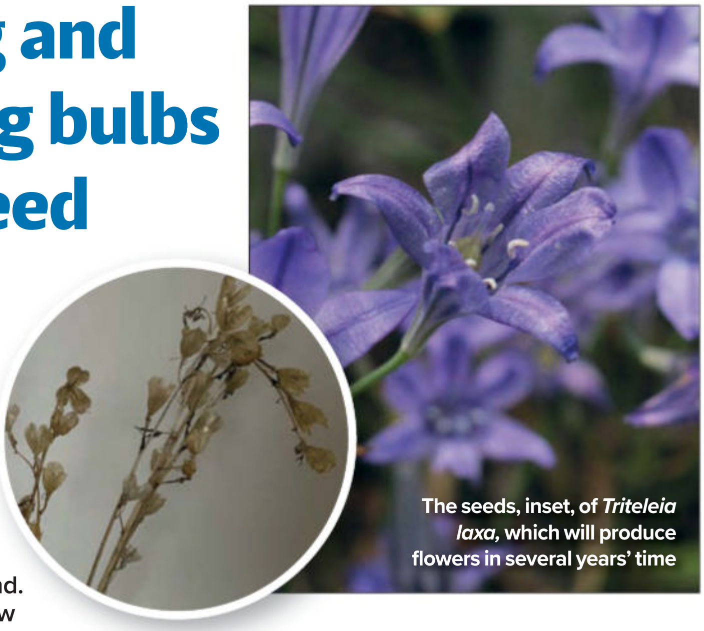
Dates and times are correct when going to press. Thanks to **pumpkinbeth.com** for the listings - check her site for more details. Please send us details of your events at least six weeks in advance to **editor@amateurgardening.com** Always check events are going ahead before leaving home.

Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

Sowing and growing bulbs from seed

Sowing bulb seeds requires patience but is worth it



The seeds, inset, of *Triteleia laxa*, which will produce flowers in several years' time

Q Can you ID these seed heads please? Seeds are quite shiny, black and round. I thought it was yellow rattle seedheads, but now I think they're something else.
Margaret Lanares (via email)

A Thank you for the attached images of what I feel sure are seeds from *Triteleia laxa*, formerly called *Brodiaea laxa*, common name Ithuriel's spear. A bulbous plant, it delights us with its impressive display of bright blue flowers in midsummer.

If you would like to raise plants from the seeds you've gathered, surface-sow them thinly in pots or trays of seed compost in autumn or spring and water them in.

Sprinkle perlite over them to keep the compost moist and position them in a sheltered, sunny part of the garden to germinate. Ideally, cover them with a cloche, sealed at both ends, to deter 'intruders'

It may be several weeks before seedlings emerge and three to five years before plants are mature enough to flower. But what a treat for later!

How can we protect our acer leaves?

Q We have a beautiful *Acer palmatum* 'Shin-deshōjō' and even though it is in a shady spot in a pot, its leaves are still shrivelling and looking burned. What else can we do?
Sheila Masters (via email)

A I am sorry that despite the shade your *Acer palmatum* 'Shin-deshōjō' is enjoying, its leaves are very sensitive to even a trace of sunlight and are discolouring shortly after opening.

The best way to guard against this unfortunate reaction is to shade it even more and feed it with sulphate of potash to provide potassium, a nutrient that toughens growth and helps it resist adverse conditions.

A good way to apply potassium is to liquid-feed your tree weekly from April to September, making sure that compost is damp beforehand.

Above: Some Japanese maple leaves need shade to stop them burning

Quick questions & answers

Above: Tree peonies are only trimmed after flowering

When do I prune a tree peony?

Q Do I prune my tree peony the same as herbaceous varieties?
Alan Parks (via email)

A No, your tree peony should not be pruned as you would a herbaceous variety, which has all its leaves cut back to near the base at this time of year.

Instead, it is left to form a sturdy bush on which flowers develop. If it does grow too large, which I doubt that it will, prune it carefully after blooming.

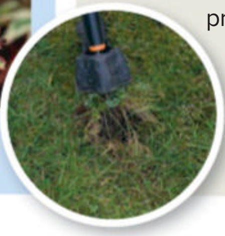
How can I banish lawn weeds?

Q What is the best way of getting rid of weeds in a lawn? We have something with silvery leaves appearing among the grass.
Martin MacDonald, North Wales

A It sounds like you have silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*) growing in your lawn.

The most effective natural method is to dig out or pull perennial weeds by hand, root and all, and re-seed any holes they leave with grass seed.

It is always worth leaving some 'weeds' to grow, maybe in an out-of-the-way spot, as their flowers provide pollen for insects and seeds for garden birds.



Left: The best way to remove lawn weeds is to pull them out

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Ask
JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

How can I look after my 'regal' gift?

Queen of the night cactus likes steady warmth and light

Q This wonderful plant was given to me, but what is it and how should I grow it?
Jenny Barrett (via email)

A The potted plant you have been given is commonly called queen of the night, botanically *Selenicereus grandiflorus*.

It is, as you say, like a scented water lily, whose blooms open at night and fade by the following morning.

Originating in Jamaica and Cuba and from lowlands in Eastern Mexico, it has become naturalised in many tropical and sub-tropical countries.

A scrambling climber to 8ft (2.4m) or more, it is happiest in a frost-free greenhouse or conservatory where it happily extends its sausage-shaped stems.

It has great charm. Indeed there are few more memorable moments than viewing it at around 10pm when its large blooms are opening and filling the air with a vanilla-like fragrance.

The radiant blooms of the queen of the night cactus

Should I risk eating these fruits?

Q I came across these trees that I believe are plum trees, but when I suggested harvesting them someone warned me they are ornamental and not edible. What do you think?
Sarah (via email)

A Thank you for the attached images. The red-fruited tree is a purple-leaved cherry plum (*Prunus cerasifera* 'Pissardii'). Its fruit are technically edible, although can be tart and are most often used to make jam. Always take care when trying new fruits as some people can be allergic to them and they may trigger a digestive problem.

The yellow-fruited tree is also an ornamental cherry. Enjoy its beauty, but think carefully before eating it.

Above: 'Pissardii' is an ornamental plum with a tart flavour and sometimes used for making jam

Quick questions & answers

A lack of sunlight can stop campsis flowering

Why did campsis fail to flower?

Q We have two mature campsis vines and neither flowered well this year. They are in a busy border with other plants. What would you advise?
Sally Thorne, West London

A I am sorry that your campsis vines haven't flowered. I suspect that both need more sunlight.

If it's not feasible to give them extra light, by pruning trees or shrubs nearby, compensate by feeding them with sulphate of potash to provide more of the nutrient potassium.

Sprinkle it over the root area at monthly intervals from spring to late summer and water it in. Potassium is essential for flowering and your soil may need more of it.

Where should I plant forget-me-nots?

Q Some forget-me-not plants were delivered without instructions. Where should I plant them?
Carole Hook (via email)

A Ideally, set them 18 to 23cm (7 to 9in) apart each way in fertile soil. If your patch needs fortifying, work in a liberal application of composted manure and bone meal, a plant food that breaks down over winter to release root-promoting phosphates in spring.

If, when flowers fade, you leave them to produce seeds, then shake plants over the soil, a wealth of seedlings will appear in summer and flower the following spring.

Left: Forget-me-nots will thrive in sun and dappled shade

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Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

Why did our wisteria not bloom this year?

The hot, dry spring and summer may have affected flowering

Q We have a young wisteria in our garden, it bloomed for the first time last year as you can see in the photo. This year it didn't bloom at all, why was this?
Richard Puttock (via email)

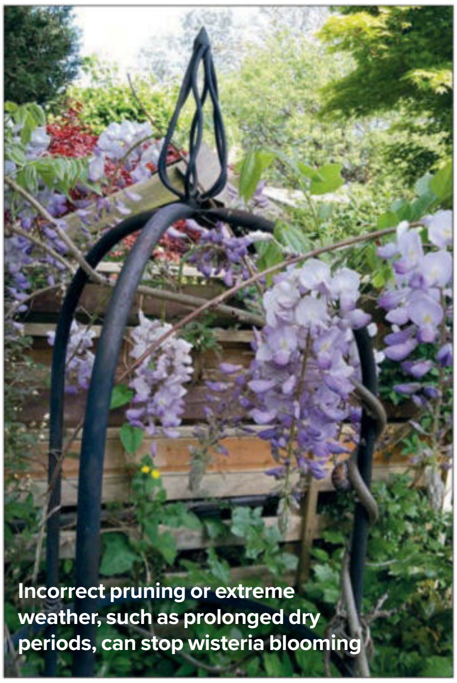
A I am sorry that your wisteria, which bloomed well last year, failed to flower this season.

Apart from early spring frost damage, which can occur if you garden in a frost pocket where cold air causes temperatures to drop on cloudless nights, causing flower buds to drop, the only other cause of non-flowering, apart from incorrect pruning, is a long period of high temperatures and little rainfall, which we've experienced this year.

In future, encourage blooms to form by feeding your wisteria with sulphate of potash to increase the availability of potassium. For the moment. sprinkle it over the root area now and next month and water it in.

Next year, and thereafter, apply it in April and continue monthly until September.

Additionally, mulch the root area with moisture-conserving composted manure or well-rotted garden compost.



Incorrect pruning or extreme weather, such as prolonged dry periods, can stop wisteria blooming

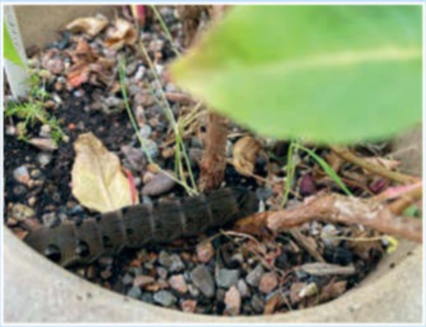
What should I do with my little 'elephant'?

Q I found an elephant hawk-moth when I was weeding my potted fuchsia. Is there anything I should or should not do to help it pupate? I do not mind sacrificing my plant or moving it as I would like to do my bit for wildlife. If it is still there later in the year, should the pot be moved somewhere warmer?
Denise Jackson (Tyne and Wear)

A What joy to discover a large elephant hawk-moth caterpillar – there is also a small species – feeding on your fuchsia.

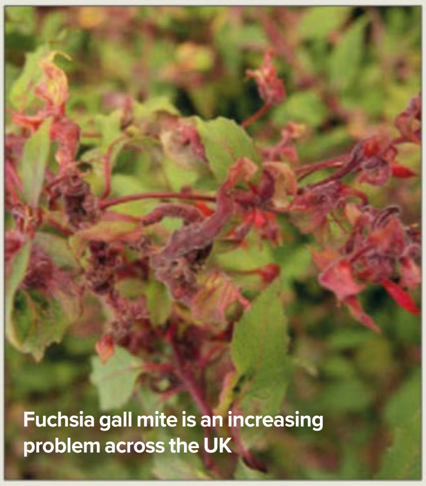
Without doubt, the sizeable larva does resemble an elephant's trunk.

When ready to pupate, it will wander around and find a secretive hideaway. When, ultimately, it emerges as a fully fledged moth, one is struck by its rich blend of red and pale brown, and its 'streamlined' appearance. Well done to you for finding it.



Above: Elephant hawk moth caterpillars pupate overwinter

Quick questions & answers



Fuchsia gall mite is an increasing problem across the UK

What has attacked our fuchsias?

Q The tips of our fuchsia shrivelled and died this year. What could have caused it?
Melanie Burton (via email)

A Bad luck! Your shrub is infested with fuchsia gall mite, a microscopic pest that distorts shoot tips and eventually kills growth.

Assuming that the plant is hardy, cut back shoots to near ground level and place prunings in a council bin or burn them.

You can also buy predatory mites that can be introduced to the plant in summer once affected growth has been removed. They are available from www.greengardener.co.uk

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How do I care for my chrysanths?

Q When can I cut down my huge chrysanthemums as they are too big for my flower beds?
Mike Pearce, Oxfordshire

A If they are hardy and, therefore, frost resistant, shorten them to 4in/10cm from the base in November.

If, however, they have large flowers and could be frost tender, move them into a greenhouse or somewhere similar in which the temperature stays well above freezing.

Right: Winter care of chrysanthemums depends on whether they are hardy or tender

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Your LETTERS TO KIM

We love receiving your letters, emails and social media posts. Every message, poem, idea and comment matters. Please keep them coming. We will send out a thank you gift for every item published in the magazine as soon as we can, so do please send your address and contact details when you get in touch.

Sunshine on a rainy day

Dear Kim,
This is one of my sunflowers in my garden. It was grown from seed and several plants were given to neighbours. All seem to have grown at least 3m (10ft) tall and are continuing to produce more flowers every day...in fact I counted about 20 the other day on the same plant. Despite the heat and drought they have all done well!

Best wishes & happy gardening

Elna Forsyth

Kim says; Elna thank you for sharing. They are such happy blooms aren't they and especially so at this time of year.

Elna's sunflower is still growing strong

Amazing second flush of amaryllis flowers

Hi Kim,
Thought you might like to see a picture of my amaryllis. It flowered in January for the second year, as expected, and I followed the advice to rest it and placed it in a quiet, shady place in the garden.

I went to check it a few weeks ago, and to my surprise it was flowering again!

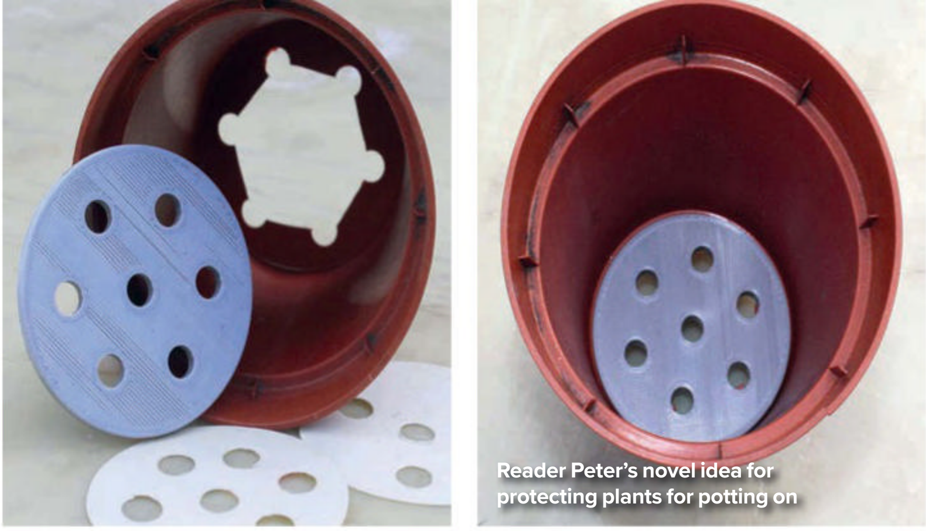
Not sure what to do with it now! Maybe John could help?

Great magazine, keep up the good work.

Regards,
Christine Gray

Kim says; thank you Christine. That's so lovely to see and I wanted to share this here, as well as passing your further question onto John Negus. He loves helping readers.

Christine's amaryllis is flowering in early autumn



Reader Peter's novel idea for protecting plants for potting on

False bottoms are the way forward

Dear Kim
I've always started my seeds in flowerpots. However, when it came to removing the seedlings from the pots for thinning and transplanting on, I invariably may have damaged their roots or stems when turning the pots upside-down and 'tapping' the compost out of the pots.

This year, however, I adopted the 'cake tin' design for each pot, by removing most of the base of each pot and replacing them with loose, false bottom discs. Originally, I used discs cut from margarine tub lids, but now have better 3D-printed plastic discs.

When it came to transplanting the seedlings this season, I simply pushed up each disc from the base of the pot, releasing the compost and seedlings intact; ensuring their stems and roots were undamaged, ready for transplanting healthier seedlings.

This year, I have seen a noticeable improvement in the health and success of the seedlings, as they matured into stronger plants.

Regards
Peter J Bott

Kim says; Peter what an ingenuous idea, thank you so much for sharing. I'd love to hear other ideas from readers on how you protect plants when potting on. Please do write in.

Protecting plants for free

Dear AG mag
I save all of the bubble wrap from packages. Come winter, I staple it into 'pillowcases' to go over my potted plants and protect them from the frost.

Love
Lucy Travel

Kim says; what a lovely idea Lucy to make use of this packaging item in a positive way in the garden.

Reader Lucy makes clever use of bubble wrap to provide 'pillowcases' for frost protection for plants

How to turn an old wheelbarrow into a blooming marvellous feature

A wonderful wheelbarrow planter

Dear Kim
I wanted to share this lovely barrow display from the back garden.

Love the magazine.
Jean Storet

Kim says; thank you so much for sharing this lovely idea for a display and what a pretty planter!

Please send us your letters, poems and musings

Your contribution is such an important part of this magazine, now and for the future.

AG is for you the people, for gardeners and proud custodians of gardens everywhere, so please do write in. We will send a gift for each letter, poem and musing published.

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UK IN DERBYSHIRE

More great gift ideas for gardeners

Some selections from the the team at *AG* magazine

Wellington boots from Le Chameau celebrating the 130th anniversary of the National Trust

Wonderful wellies

As we nudge that bit closer to winter, thoughts turn to gardening clobber that enables us to carry on engaging in our favourite pastime. Reassuringly, wellies will provide ample protection no matter the weather.

The unisex Arctic Sport wellington boot from Muck Boot is a hard-wearing and warm ally, featuring a super soft fleece lining and neoprene for comfort and ease of use. It also has a clever stretch fit top-line binding to keep cold air out and provide further protection. Its heavy-duty EPA moulded sole provides extra reinforcement and stability on muddy surfaces over the months ahead. These hard-wearing heroes are built to last and last and are suitable for both men and women.

RRP £134 *www.muckbootcompany.co.uk*

Next we have an exciting, classy and very resilient and sustainable boot from Le Chameau. The company's classic Vierzon style boot is being customised to celebrate the 130th anniversary of the National Trust.

This celebratory boot is designed in an exclusive colourway and made from start to finish by Le Chameau's master bootmakers, using supple Chamolux$^{\text{TM}}$ rubber for comfort and durability.

The Oak Green colourway, unique Le Chameau x National Trust logo and bespoke Écho lining print, inspired by Buckland Abbey, honours Britain's natural and cultural heritage.

Sustainability also sits at the heart of the design with a jersey lining made from organic cotton and recycled polyester, a removable antibacterial insole made with recycled materials, and adjustable straps crafted from 100% post-consumer recycled bottles.

RRP £220 *www.lechameau.com*

Keeping in heat with a hat

Keeping snug in winter is a key factor in successful, healthy gardening.

We lose a lot of warmth from our head, so put a stop to that with this gorgeous cable-knit Merino wool hat from gardening clothing manufacturer Genus.

This stylish unisex headgear comes in five attractive colours (rusty orange, soft 'alchemilla' green, bright Pacific blue, dark earth and tayberry red) and is snug enough to stay put without feeling constricting.

Colourful cable knit merino hats from Genus

As it is 100% wool, it is designed to be long-lasting and needs hand-washing in cool water and drying flat.

The Genus cable knit merino hat costs £32 from *www.genus.gs*

A spade with style

Who doesn't want a 'golden' tool? This very strong, sharp and surprisingly light spade from Niwaki is ideal for all-purpose digging, tree planting, and rootball removal.

It has a lovely, and very comfortable, handle of tubular steel, a firm tread and rigid steel pipe shaft which means it is very reliable and hardy for heavier use.

RRP From £36 for the shorter-handled version. *www.niwaki.com*

Above: Spade from Niwaki

Get in touch if you'd like to suggest a product for these pages
editor@amateurgardening.com

PLANT WATCH

With **Michael Perry**

Exciting recommendations from our expert plantsman

Beautiful black-tinged flowers of 'Tamburo'

Dahlias to brighten every border

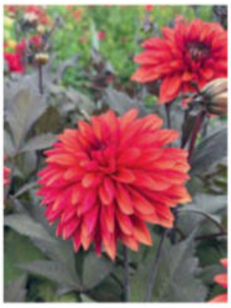
Plan ahead for a colourful late-summer garden with **Michael's** fantastic frilly-flowered finds

Few flowers bring as much colour and cheer to the garden as dahlias. They bloom in so many shapes and shades, it's hard not to smile when they appear. Whether you grow them in pots, beds or for the vase, dahlias always give a fabulous show. I've been to the CNB trials in the Netherlands to see what's happening in the world of dahlias.

The best thing about dahlias is that each one feels different. Some are bold, some are soft, and some look like they're straight out of a sweet shop. Choosing them is like picking friends for your garden – each adds their own spark. Here's some of my favourites from the trials:

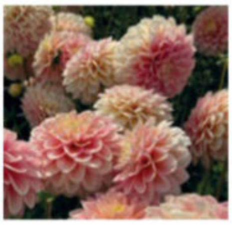
'Tamburo'

Dark and moody, 'Tamburo' brings a splash of drama to the garden. Its near-black flowers look amazing next to bright colours or silver leaves. Small in size but big in style, this one always makes an impact.



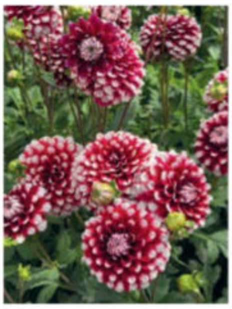
'Tiramisu'

Just like the dessert, 'Tiramisu' is a real treat. Soft swirls of cream, pink, and coffee tones mix together on each bloom. Every flower looks a little different, making it a fun choice for pots or cutting.



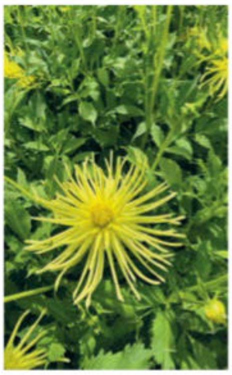
'Giovanna'

'Giovanna' is bold and bright, with large flowers that stand tall. It's a real show-off in the garden and looks fantastic in a vase.



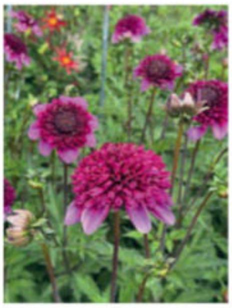
'Checkers'

With its patterned petals, 'Checkers' is full of fun. It has a playful look that makes borders feel lively and fresh. Easy to grow and generous with blooms, it's a great pick for any gardener.



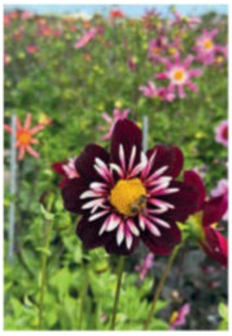
'Gryson's Yellow Spider'

'Gryson's Yellow Spider' is pure sunshine in flower form. Its bright yellow heads light up the garden and shine even on grey days. Pair it with blue or purple flowers for a colour combo that pops.



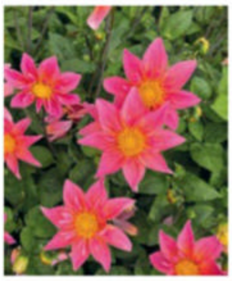
'Missis Abigail'

Soft and sweet, 'Missis Abigail' has a gentle look. It fits perfectly in cottage-style gardens and makes a lovely cut flower. Romantic and pretty, it brings a softer mood to any planting.



'Night Butterfly'

With deep red petals and a creamy middle, 'Night Butterfly' looks dramatic and different. It's a real talking point in the garden, standing out with its striking colours. Perfect if you like something unusual.



'Pepita Pink'

Cute and cheerful, 'Pepita Pink' is full of charm. Its bright pink blooms keep coming all summer and into autumn. Small enough for pots but bold enough to shine, this one is a little star.

mrplantgeek.substack.com

All images © Michael Perry

Throughout the ages, different cultures have created gardens as places of relaxation, spirituality and beauty - just as we still do today

Gardening as a force for good

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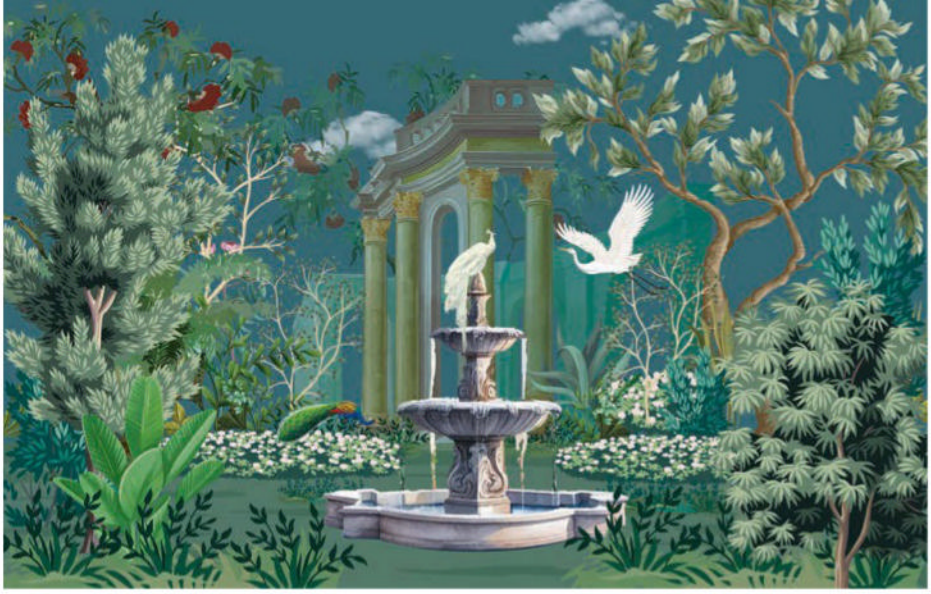
Toby ponders the whys and wherefores of gardening and its meaning through the ages

Gardening isn't just about plants; the how and why of the people that do it is just as important. The 'how' is interesting as down the ages horticultural know-how has hardly changed: seeds are sown, trees are pruned and secateurs are lost. It is the 'why' that has evolved considerably.

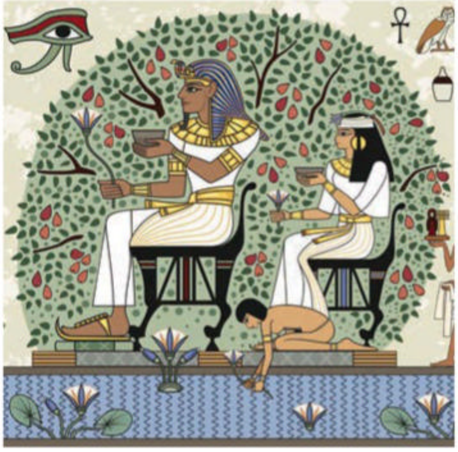
In the beginning there was a square patch of paradise known as the Garden of Eden, so it is said. Whatever your belief, the story of Eden indicates that gardens were regarded as divine back in the day. Take the pharaohs of ancient Egypt - their job wasn't just to rule and build pyramids, they were the link between humanity and the heavens and, like Eden, their gardens were sacred and free from the ungodly chaos of the outside world.

The idea that spirituality was close in a garden was picked up and refined by the Persians who added water (symbolic rivers) and symmetrically planted trees within quadrangular designs. Known as

Toby ponders the meaning of gardening



Roman gardens were about pleasure and prestige



Above: The Egyptians saw gardens as sacred spaces

‘paradise gardens’, these walled wonders were made for meditation as within them the gap between the physical world and heaven was as thin as silk.

Greek and Roman approaches to gardening

The Ancient Greeks had walled gardens too, planted with good things including figs, grapes, and herbs for flavouring dishes and use in religious ritual. Contemplation was important, but the fun-loving Greeks also used their outdoor rooms for recreation, teaching and social gatherings. The Romans, who copied all the Greeks’ homework, did the same.

The Romans did add a new reason ‘why’ to gardens though when they became supremely rich, recognising that a garden said a lot about its owner’s place in the pecking order. If you were self-respecting and powerful, owning the views all the way to the horizon was an important thing. A principle I’ve copied here at Buckland Castle...

Above: Outdoor spaces have long been used for meditation and mindfulness

© Toby Buckland

Above: Japanese gardens feature many elements essential to create harmony, meaning and balance (inset)

Eastern philosophy and the great outdoors

In the East, the Chinese had a similar garden evolution, from sanctuaries for rulers to places for meditation, retreat, and the appreciation of nature’s beauty.

We’re still scratching the surface of their long and magnificent garden tradition, but we do know more about the gardens of their near neighbours in Japan. Or at least we think we do.

A few years ago during a holiday in India, I ordered a pizza from a restaurant in Jaipur. The pizza in the photo looked vaguely authentic, but what was served - a chapati smeared with hot chilli paste and blobs of dhal - was as far from a quattro formaggi as Rajasthan is from Rome.

I mention this as our comprehension of why the Japanese people make gardens is just as sketchy. We might have ingredients like maples, moss-covered rocks, raked gravel and carefully placed stones to resemble Mount Fuji, but the recipe required for an authentic Japanese garden needs an understanding of concepts for which we don’t even have words.

Reading Japanese gardens

The design principle *Ma* is one of many examples. When we set out gardens in the UK, the plants, paths and pergolas go where we want them. In the Japanese tradition though, the *Ma*, or as we’d say the ‘negative space’ or gaps between garden elements, is just as important and essential to create harmony, meaning, and balance. We, on the other hand, just bung stuff in.

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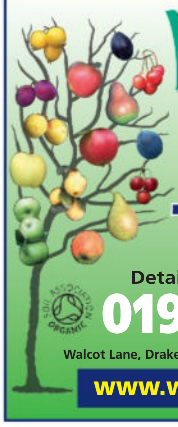

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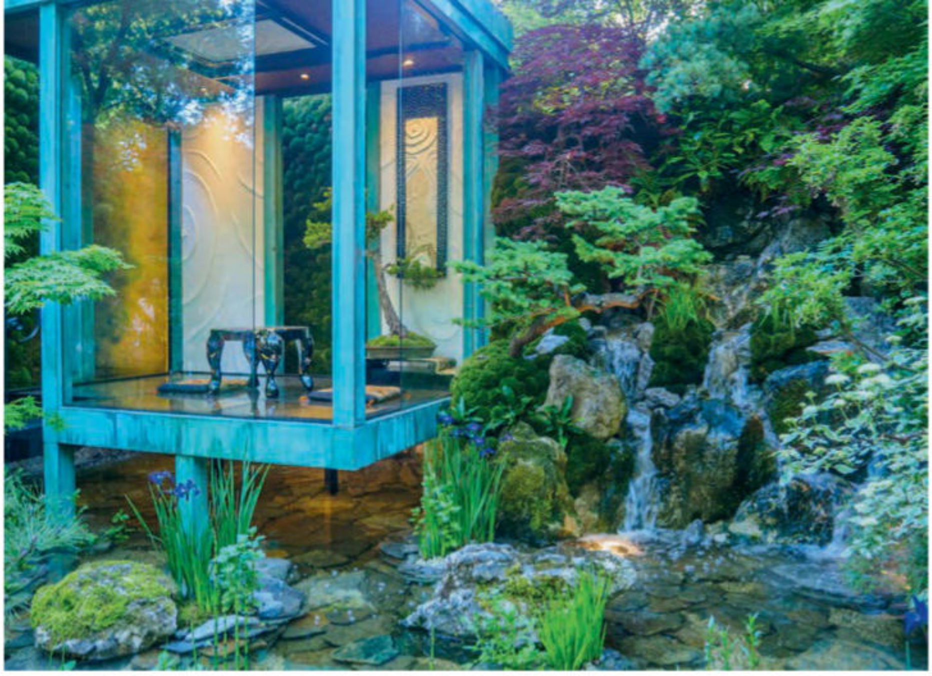


Above: Gosho No Niwa No Wall, No War **the gold medal-winning Artisan Garden by Japanese master Kazuyuki Ishihara at RHS Chelsea in 2017**

Gardens have become a force for good; for wildlife and wellbeing

I'm reminded of this when I am filming at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show each year, and I'm drawn to the miniaturised landscapes of Japanese garden designer Kazuyuki Ishihara.

His moss-covered gardens and crafted tea houses are perfection, but I can't pretend to fully comprehend the *Ma,* or for that matter, the 'beauty in the transient and imperfect nature of things' that's known as *Wabi-sabi;* while the *Yūgen*, the profound, indirect, and mysterious beauty that is not fully revealed, is wasted on me. Try as I might to 'read' the gardens, they are written in a design language that isn't my native tongue. I guess you need to grow up aware of the volcanoes, tsunamis, and earthquakes of Japan to appreciate how powerful nature is and how tenuous life can be.

Western approaches to gardening

The Western gardening ethos is easier for most of us to understand. The magnificent straight lines of Versailles in France stretch to the horizon and echo the Roman ethos which speaks of control, even over Mother Nature.

They inspired the English landscape designers Capability Brown and Humphry Repton, who remodelled nature by removing hills, planting woodlands and digging giant lakes.

Their ethos was to echo the views and landscapes of Tuscany and bring nature right up to the homes of the well-heeled.

Alongside the grand, there have always been modest plots used for growing food or herbs for medicine and from the 16th century, botanic gardens were full of plants collected for scientific study.

Gardening for wildlife and wellbeing

During the past two centuries the size of gardens has shrunk but the number of gardeners has grown. Our outside spaces may be smaller, but they are as diverse as ever and used for productivity, relaxation and, for some, showing off/boosting a property's value.

This we all know. But when you're in an era, it's hard to know what defines it. That's a job for historians when we and our era are compost.

However, despite still being alive, I'd like to put it out there: gardens have never before been such a force for good.

There are the personal health benefits and the fact that they can boost the wellbeing of others.

Take the 'Yellow Book' gardens owned by people that generously open up their plots for paying visitors in the name of the National Garden Scheme charity. The NGS has been running for almost 100 years and raised over £74 million pounds for cancer and nursing charities. Brilliant!

Then there's the current emphasis on planting for wildlife, growing flowers rich in pollen and creating habitats for hedgehogs, slow worms and birds.

It might feel that the world is going to wrack and ruin, but it isn't doing so in our gardens. The 'how' might never change... *have you seen my secateurs?* ...but 'why' we garden is oh so more important than ever.

Above left: **The Capability Brown-designed grounds at Sheffield Park in East Sussex remodelled nature** Above right: **Alongside the grand there were also smaller gardens for growing food or herbs for medicine, as with the historic Physic Garden in Edinburgh (pictured)**

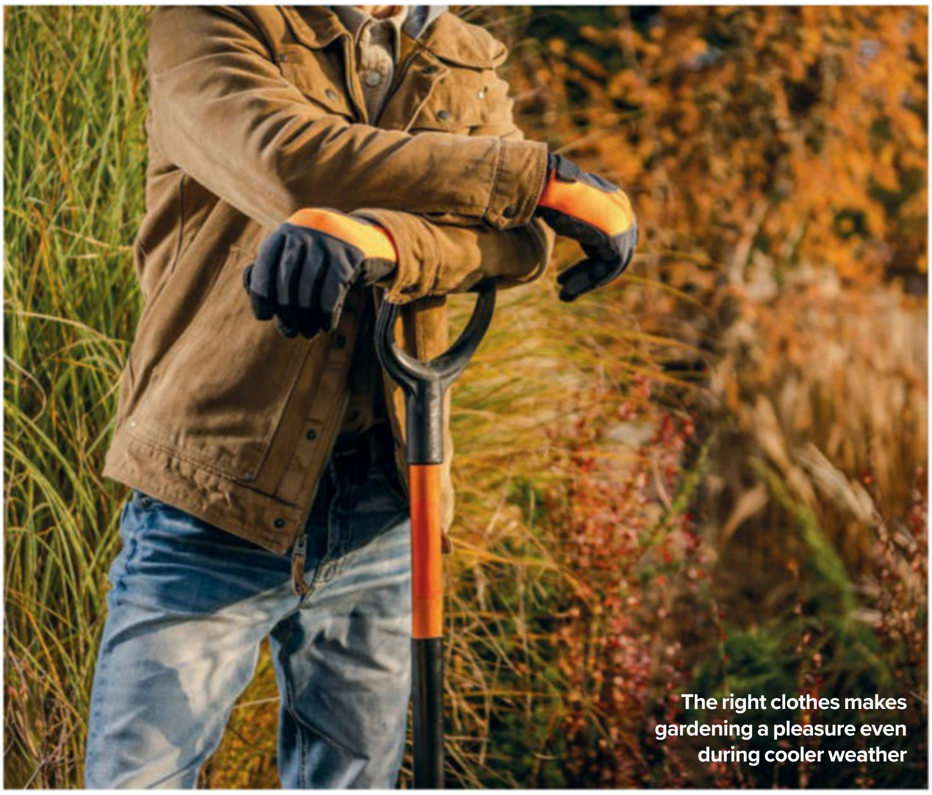
GARDEN MUSINGS

with **Bob Flowerdew**, long-standing *AG* contributor, broadcaster and all-round expert.

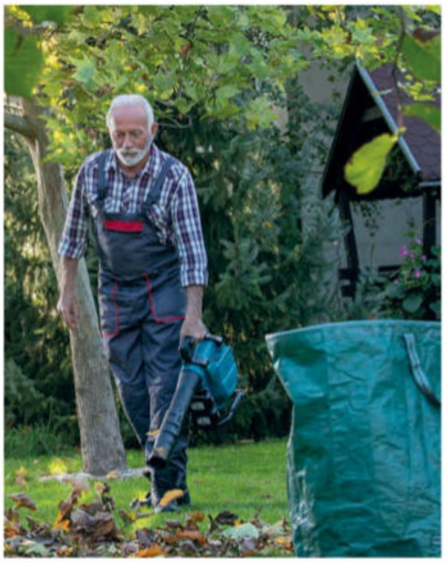
How to stay warm this winter

Bob explains why clothes maketh the gardener and enable us to carry on doing what we love into the colder months

As we move towards winter there are still plenty of tasks; harvesting late crops and seeds, clearing beds and borders, making and turning compost, hedging, planting and pruning. However, we're no longer in the balmy days of summer and now need more warmth than shorts and T-shirt provide. Fortunately, gardening clothing generally avoids fashion trends, most of us just wear whatever's convenient; comfort's more important than the look. (Each to their own,maybe some folk 'dress up' to garden; we can't know what goes on the other side of some hedges. Periodically folk appear in the news for gardening nude. Tried that once: it's okay only if your garden is totally devoid of absolutely any stinging nettles, holly, brambles etc and in hot weather, do watch out for sunburn, er, down below.)



The right clothes makes gardening a pleasure even during cooler weather



Above: Dungarees and overalls are a firm favourite for many gardeners

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Consider a tweed jacket

Anyway, back to our clothes and the time of year: we need to stay warm or work is not done comfortably or well. Remember, though, if you're about to do some heavy sustained work, to 'strip before you sweat, cover before you cool'. I reckon most of us already have a favourite gardening jacket. An old familiar one makes sense as it is so easily taken off for hard work yet gives that extra warmth, and handy pockets. Do consider a tweed jacket though, and it's worth checking charity shops for them. These coats are not for style but for comfort as wool keeps you warm despite cold winds, even when it gets wet. And a coat one size too large is best as it enables you to slip it over really thick pullovers AND your overalls.

Overalls keep warmth in

This last piece of apparel is too often overlooked, but it's brilliant. Overalls are just that, you slip into them and zip up like a 'onesie' or catsuit. They protect from dirt and whatever clothes, or not, you have underneath, they keep you really warm. First there's the extra layer, indeed you can have thin cotton overalls for warmer weather and a thicker, heavier set for winter. But their greatest advantage (especially around polite company) is that overalls do not expose your lower back area (or more) when you bend over or crouch. Almost inevitably whilst working hard in trousers or jeans with a top, these pull apart letting cold air in - right over your kidneys - and this could hardly be worse. Overalls cannot separate, so the air is held inside and stays warmer, so it is much more pleasant. A polo/roll neck pullover also helps conserve warmth as much is lost round the neck. And even more heat is lost from the head.

Not forgetting head protection

Finally, what do you notice about everyone in old photos of yesterday, particularly those of gardeners? They're all wearing hats! I've many, from cotton bandanas for summer to thick wool balaclavas for deepest winter. Balaclavas are exceptionally suitable when pruning congested trees and shrubs as they cannot fall or get snagged off. But to save causing a disturbance, best take it off before going out on the street...

You can find out more about Bob via his website **www.bobflowerdew.com**

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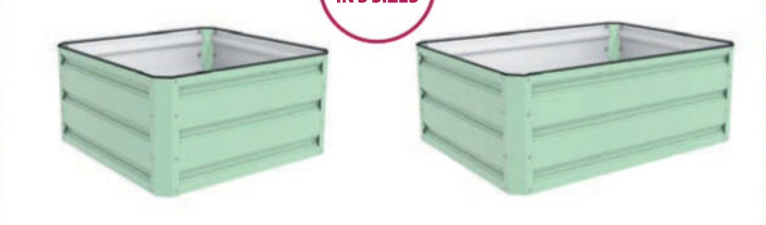

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